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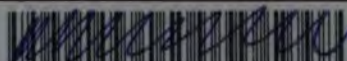
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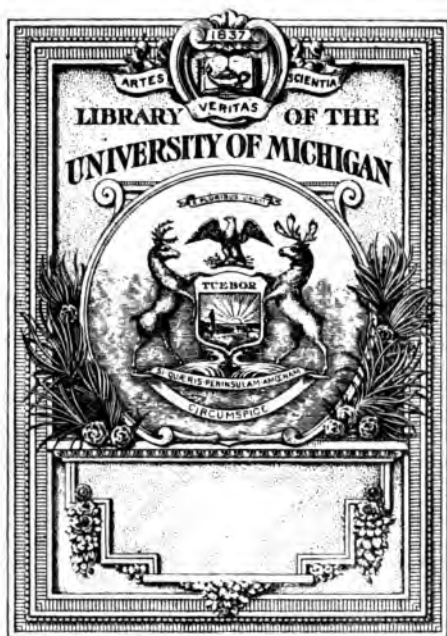
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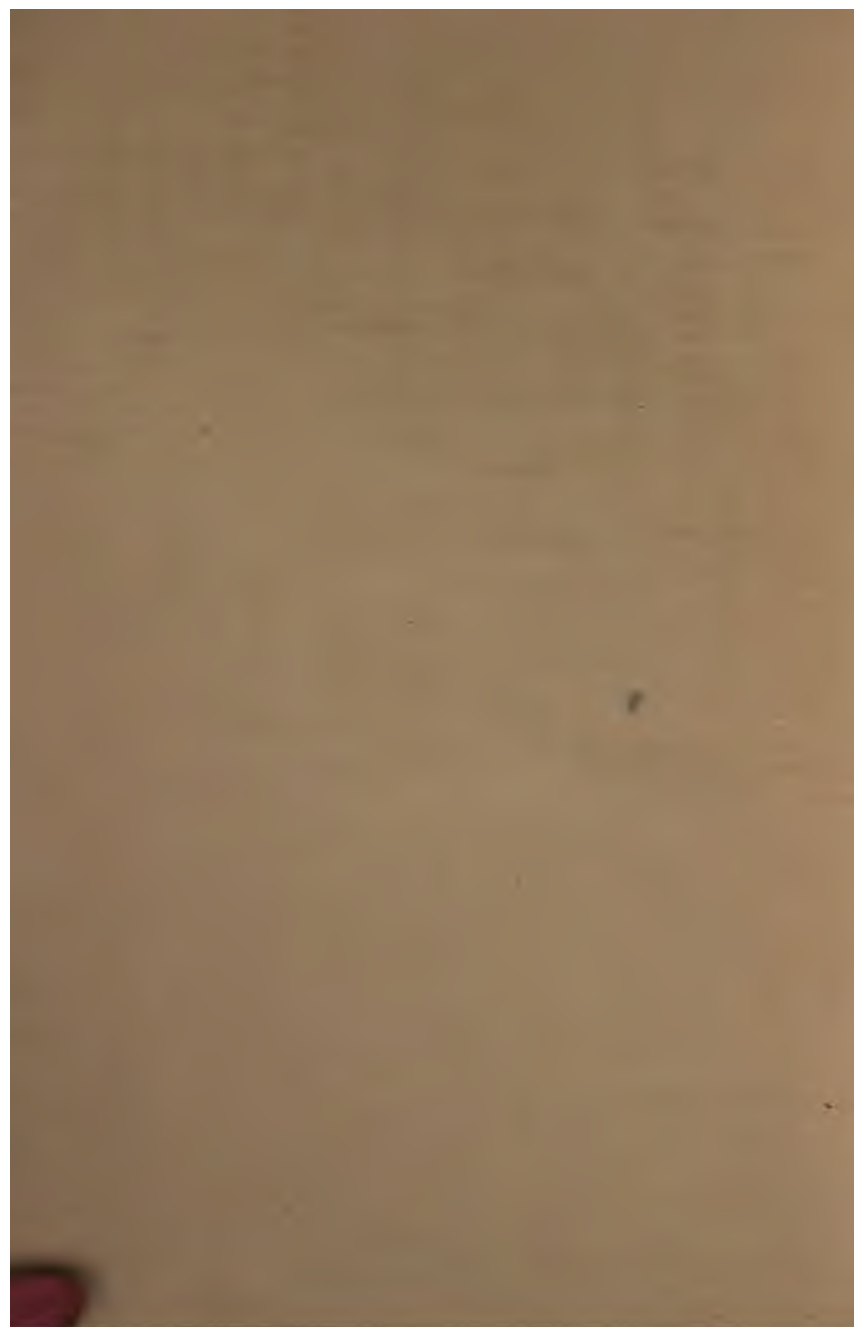


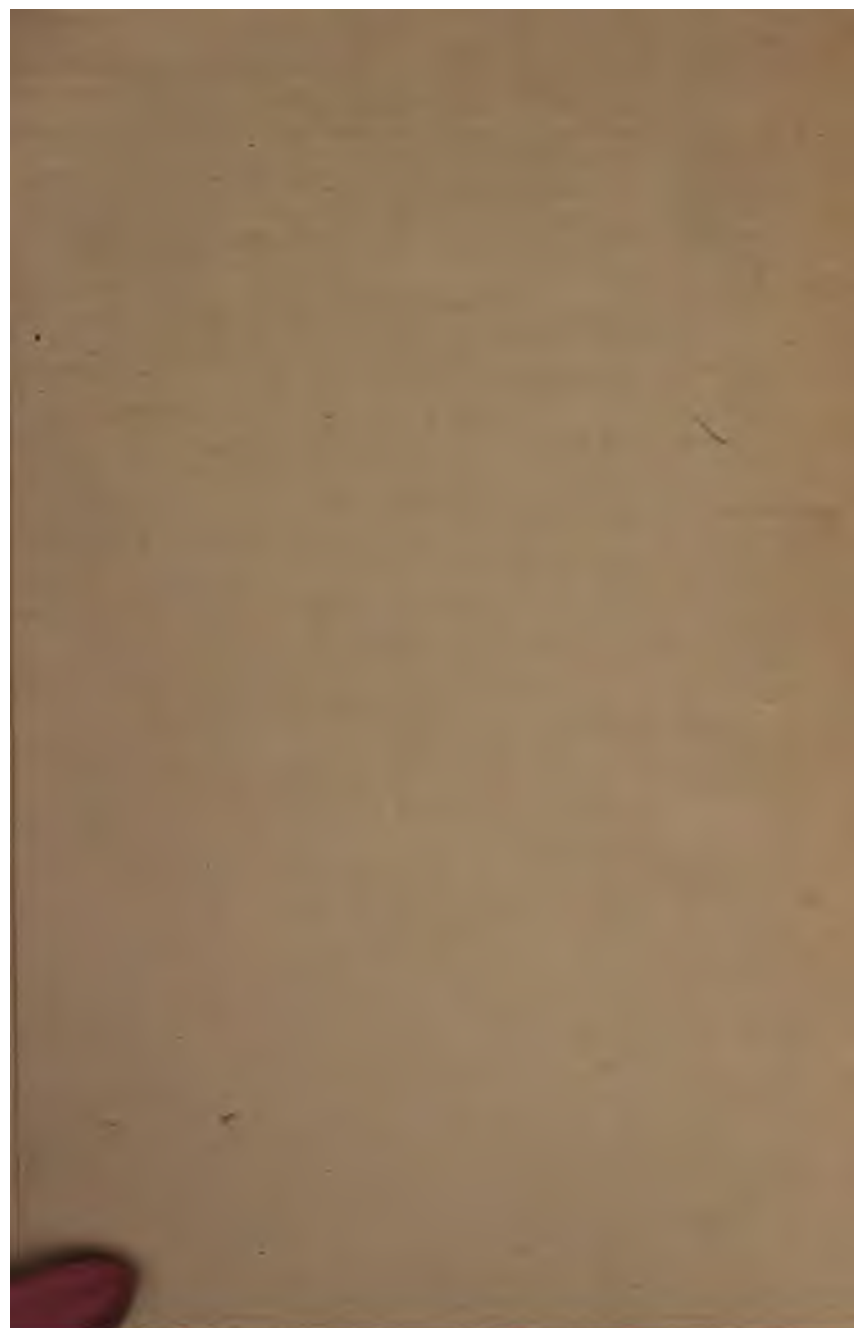
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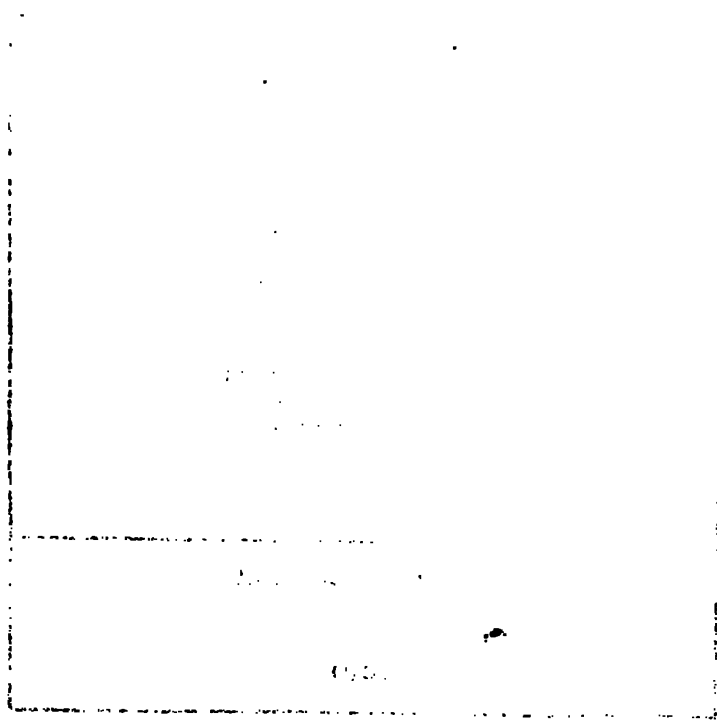
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THE AUTHORS AND NEWSPAPERS ASSOCIATION

**KATE MEREDITH,
FINANCIER**



They explained in bold, clear tones that they were the chief
ju-ju men of all Africa. Page 224.



Kate Meredith

FINANCIER

By



C. J. CUTCLIFFE HYNE

Author of

"Captain Kettle, K.C.B.," "McTodd,"
"The Filibuster," "Adventures of Captain Kettle,"
"The Trials of Commander McTurk."

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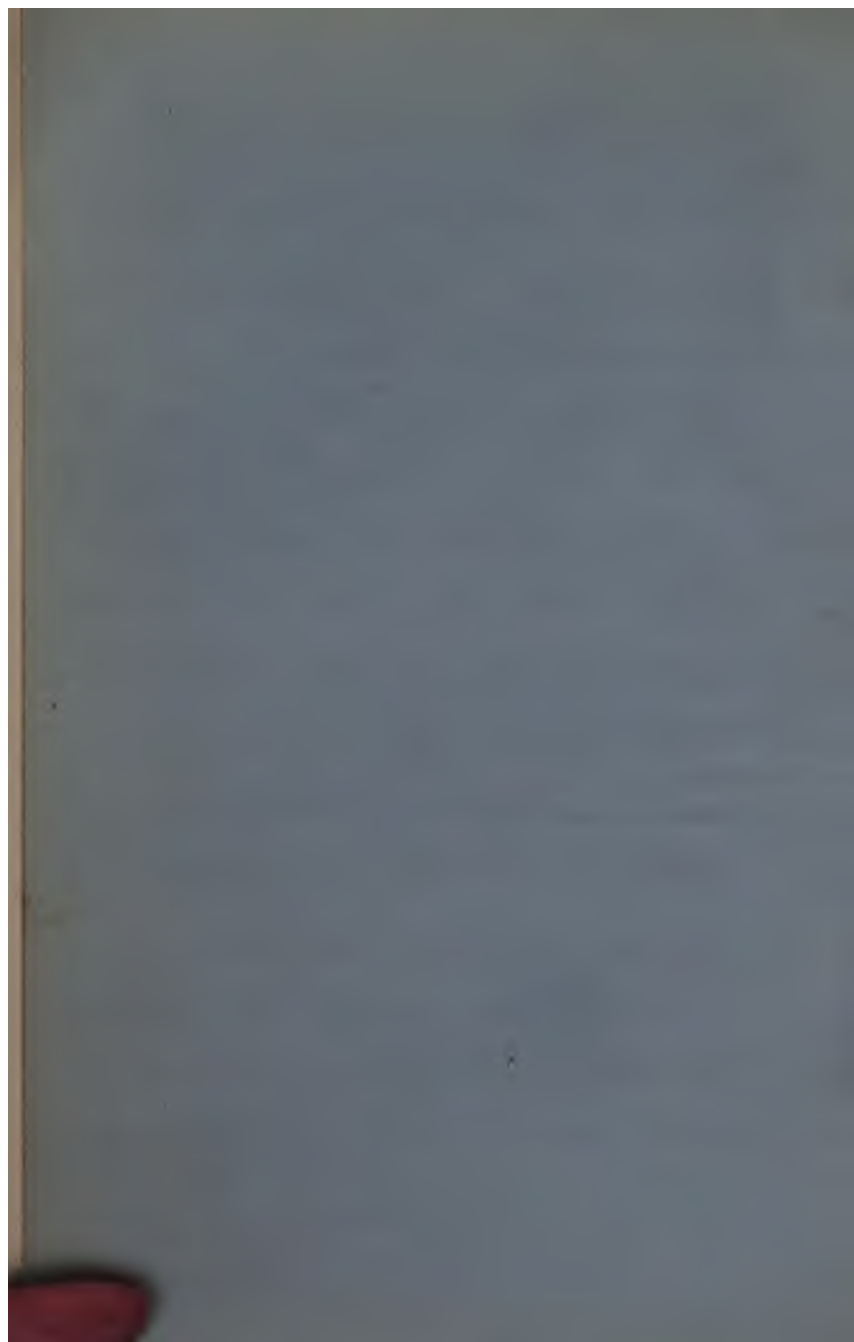
"Mighty hot beach today," Captain
hunge sprumpled, sketched the line
across to the Pincer.

M^r Bulgaries tossed his cigarette
over the lee rail, & tucked a sheet
paper into his mouth so as to have
two spare hands. Day but ten minutes
before glared up as an oily swell-wisher
and bottle-green. Dew lay in fat
gleams on the deck-planks & bright
frames, foretelling in clear prophecy
another spell of scalding west African
sunshine. But a mile out from the bellavine
beach on the beach, the M'posso butlocked
sullenly over the swell, with engines raring off,
E. J. Antcliffe Apr.



"Mighty hot beach today," Captain
Lunge grumbled, shouldered the binoculars
across to the Purser.

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sullenly on the swell, with engines raring off,
E. J. Gresham Apr.



KATE MEREDITH, FINANCIER

CHAPTER I

A WEST COAST WELCOME

"MIGHTY beach to-day!" grumbled Captain Image, and handed binoculars across to the purser.

Mr. Balgarnie tossed his cigarette over the lee rail and tucked a sheaf of papers into his mouth so as to have two spare hands. Day had ten minutes before glared up over an oily swell-writhing sea of bottle-green; dew lay in fat greasy gouts on the deck planks and the skylight frames, foretelling in clear prophecy another spell of scalding West African sunshine; and a mile out from the crashing, bellowing surf that smoked along the beach, the S.S. *M'poso* buttocked sullenly over the swells, with engines rung off, and sweating firemen on the top of the fiddley, slewing ventilators to catch a flavor of the breeze.

"They've seen us, sir, at the factory," said Mr. Balgarnie. "All the boys are out working cargo, and there's old Swizzle-Stick Smith sucking his eternal pipe and hustling them with a chiquot. I can catch the glint of his eyeglass. Wonder how long that man's been out on the Coast? Must be a matter of twenty years now by all accounts since he had his last run home. He's found the right kind of ju-ju to dodge fever-palaver, anyhow. They

say he's a lazy old beach-comber as a general thing, but he's up bright and early this morning."

"Wouldn't you rouse out in a hurry if you only saw a Christian steamboat once in three months at the oftenest? I told the second mate to make fast the whistle string to the bridge rail when he judged he was five miles off the old sinner's beach, and I guess Swizzle-Stick Smith jumped slap through his mosquito bar at the first toot. See those pyjamas he's wearing? He bought them at the forecastle shop aboard here just six months ago."

"Blue, with a pink stripe, so they are. This is a rare good glass of yours, sir. Yes, I remember Chips telling me. Three pairs he got at nine bob a pair. Wouldn't pay a sixpence more. And tried to get a bottle of Eno thrown in as a make-weight. Phew! but this day's going to be a ringtailed scorcher. Look at the mist clearing away from those hills at the back already."

Captain Image stuffed a pipe and lit it. "It's a murdering bad beach to-day," he repeated. "Always is when there's a few tons of cargo waiting for me to get commission on."

The purser touched no cargo commission, and so had but small sympathy for cargo gathering. "I see old Swizzle-Stick's making his boys run down the oil casks into the surf. They'll never swim them through. Rather a pity, isn't it, sir, to stay on here and let them try? They're bound to get half of them stove at the very least."

"That's his palaver. I missed calling here last round. There was a swell like a cliff that day; but then there always is a bad beach along this run of the Coast; and so he should have double lot of cargo ready for me. There'll be oil and there'll be rubber, and I shouldn't wonder but what he's a few bags of kernels as well. I bet that factory on the beach there is just bulging with cargo. It ought

to tally up to quite fifty tons, and I'm not going to have some other captain snapping up old Swizzle-Stick Smith's trade if I know it. Balgarnie, my lad, I'd the straight tip given me from O'Neill and Craven's in Liverpool when I was home. If we don't make it handy to call at their factories along this Coast, the Hamburg boats will. They've shipped a new director or something at O'Neill and Craven's—K. O'Neill he signs himself—and that man intends to make things hum."

"My Whiskers!" said the Purser. "I clean forgot. We've a new clerk for O'Neill and Craven's here at Mallanulla. It's that red-haired young chap, Carter, in the second class."

"Last three red-haired passengers I knew all pegged out within three months of being put ashore. Color of the hair seems to counteract the effects of drugs. Purser, I'll bet you just two cocktails Carter's planted before we're here again next trip."

"It's on," said Mr. Balgarnie, "and I shall remember it. The young chap's made me a picture frame for my room as good as you could buy in a shop, and he's built the Doc some barbed arrows just like those Kasai ones the old chief brought along from the Congo when he was on the Antwerp run. He's a handy young fellow."

"That doesn't get over the red hair, Purser. You'll lose that cocktail. Bet you another cocktail, if you like, he gets spilt in the surf getting ashore."

Mr. Balgarnie winked pleasantly. "Then we'll consider that last one lost already." He put his head inside the chart-house and called out the captain's Krooboy steward—"Brass-Pan?"

"Yessar."

"We fit for two cocktail."

"Savvy."

"You lib for my room, you fetch dem gin-bottle, an' give him to bar steward."

"Savvy."

"Well, what are you waiting for? Get along, you bushman, one-time . . . That's a poor boy I'm afraid you've got, Captain."

"Pipe-clays shoes very neatly," said Captain Image. "Oh, you've brought those papers for me to sign. Well, come into the chart-house, Purser, and we'll get them through. Hope that fool of a boy will bring the cocktails quick. These early morning chills are dangerous unless you take the proper preventives."

Meanwhile the brazen day had grown, and work proceeded at a forced speed both on the steamer and on the beach. Ashore, the lonely factory bustled with evil-scented negroes, who strained at huge white-ended palm oil puncheons. On the *M'poso* a crew of chattering Krooboys busied themselves aft, and presently under the guidance of a profane third mate a brace of surf-boats jerked down towards the water, the tackles squealing like a parcel of angry cats as they rendered through the blocks. The boats spurned away into the clear sea before the steamer's rusty iron side crashed down onto them: the Krooboys perched themselves ape-like on the gunwales, paddle in hand: and in the stern of each straddled a noisy headman, in billy-cock and trousers, straining and swaying at the steering car.

The headman was in charge, and the well-spiced official English of ship-board ceased. The speech in the boats was one of the barbaric tongues of savage Africa. But the work they got through and the skill they showed exceeded by far that which could have been put forth by any crew of white men. Indeed, in his more pious moments, Captain Image, in common with other mariners of his kind, firmly

believed that God had invented certain of the West African Coast tribes for the sole purpose of handling the boats of the Liverpool oil tanks on surf-smitten beaches.

Now, Captain Image was not in the least degree a snob, and he did not take even first-class passengers on their face value. As he would explain to intimates, he was not out on the Coast for his health; he very much wished to be able some day to retire on a competency, and grow cabbages outside of Cardiff; and so he dispensed his affability on a nicely regulated scale. If a man could influence cargo in the direction of the *M'poso*, Captain Image was ready at all times to extend to him the rough red hand of friendship, and to supply gin cocktails and German champagne till conversation flowed into the desired commercial channel. He called this casting bread upon the waters, and could always rely on getting the prime cost back in commission. But he was no man to waste either his good liquor or his pearls of speech on a mere fifty-pound-a-year clerk, with a red head, who would very possibly be dead before the *M'poso's* next call, and who certainly could influence no cargo for the next two years to come. So from the day they left Liverpool to the day when the steamer's forefoot scraped at her cable off Malla-Nulla beach, Captain Image had not condescended to offer that particular second-class passenger so much as a morning nod.

But Captain Image was kindly enough in the West African way, and when he had drunk his morning cocktail and gone through the Purser's papers, he came out of the chart-house again and produced from his pyjama pocket a half-filled box of pills.

"There, my lad," he said to Carter, as he made the presentation, "you take one of those according to the directions on the lid, when required, and you'll have your

health kept in a repair that will surprise you. Now, mark me well; you'll be tempted with other brands of pills; old Swiz—I mean Mr. Smith, your boss, is a regular crank on drugs; but as sure as you tip other medicines down into your inside, my pills will get hindered at their proper work, and you'll be knocked over."

"Thanks," said Carter. "But I always understood——"

"I'm sure you did. Now there's one other thing I want to impress on you, my lad. Your duty is to get on, and the way to do that is to scratch up cargo and send it home by the *M'poso*. You see, my lad, I've got more influence with O'Neill and Craven than any other captain on the Coast (though you needn't go and stir up mischief by spreading that about), and if you keep yourself in my memory by the way Malla-Nulla ships cargo by me, I'll let them fully understand at the home office that services like yours want a big raise in salary. There, don't you bother to thank me, my lad, and just you stow that box of pills where they won't get lost if you're spilt going ashore through that surf. It's a mighty bad beach to-day."

"Ah, morning, Carter," said Mr. Balgarnie as he bustled up. "Got all your things up on deck? It's no concern of mine, of course, but if there are any little odds and ends you want, such as socks, or Florida water, or a mosquito bar, I believe Chips and the bos'n keep a sort of surreptitious shop somewhere in the forecabin where you could fill up your stores."

"Much obliged," said the passenger, "but I think I've got all I want, or rather all I can afford."

"Remembered to bring donkey-clippers for hair-cutting? No? Well, just as you please. What I really wished to mention to you was this: when your pay comes in, you'll naturally want little comforts sent out from home, and you won't care to worry any of your friends to get them

for you. Now don't you have any qualms about making use of me. Just say what you want, and I'll get it and bring it out." Mr. Balgarnie winked most pleasantly. "I'm purser here, of course, and have to back up the Company's charges, but I can always make the rates reasonable to oblige a friend. There, good-by, old fellow. The boat's ready to take you off."

A surf boat swung dizzily up and down at the guess-warp alongside and the two yellow gladstone bags on its floor seemed ludicrously out of place beside the savage paddlers. Carter was conscious that his heart worked up to an unpleasant activity; but he carried a serene face, dropped to his knees in the gangway, and began with unaccustomed feet to clamber down the Jacob's ladder. He noted without disturbance that he was daubing coal dust and orange-colored palm oil onto his hands and white drill clothes in the process; but he had a mind now which entirely disregarded the trivial; all his interest was fixed upon the boat.

"Don't jump too soon."

"Take care you don't drop that new pith hat."

"Mind, don't let the boat come up and squash you."

"Don't flurry the man so. Put your feet in your pocket if you see a shark."

A stream of advice, much of it satirical, pelted him from above. Looking over his shoulder, he saw beneath him the leaping boat and a ring of negro grins. It was these last that stiffened him into action. The surf-boat swooped up sideways, and when it seemed to him that she had reached the zenith of her leap, he let go the Jacob's ladder and sprang for her.

It is a matter of nice judgment, this determination of the psychological moment for a jump; and the amateur has it not. As a consequence Carter's foot slid on the wet

gunwale; he buttocked painfully onto a thwart; and was saved from spinning overboard by rough and ready black fingers. The new pith helmet received its first crack, the white drill clothes were further soiled, and he was left to gather himself out of the slop of water on the bottom of the boat as best he pleased. Already the Krooboy crew were perched ape-like on the gunwales, and stabbing strenuously at the water with trident-headed paddles. The headman straddled in the stern with the muscles standing out in him like nuts, as he sculled with the steering oar.

It had all passed so quickly that the steamer had only accomplished one-half of a roll. The white faces that he had seen last beside him were now small and far away at the top of an enormously high iron wall, and to their shouts of farewell and fluttering of handkerchiefs he could not bring himself to return more than a curt hand-wave. It seemed to him that he was cut off entirely from white men and white man's territory, and was launched beyond release into West Africa with all its smells and accoutrements.

He settled himself in the mid thwart of the surf-boat with the water on the floor flowing merrily in and out of his pipe-clayed shoes. Whatever a white man may feel, he always assumes coolness and indifference before the black, and Carter picked up the instinct of his race.

His progress shoreward had two distinct phases. At one time he and the boat lay in a watery ravine with high sides towering above him, and no view save of sleek bottle-green water and cobalt sky overhead. The next moment he was expressed upwards on to an eminence and there before him lay landscape and seascape of most pleasant qualities. At these last moments of exaltation, he saw a glaring beach set along the sea's edge, carrying white factory buildings, and backed in by an orderly wall of green.

He saw also palm-oil puncheons being brought off, and

an interest in the work bit him immediately. Here was the commodity which (bar death) would for years to come be his chiefest intimate. Between eclipses of the rollers, he watched every stage of the work—the great white-ended barrels rolled down the glaring beach, naked savages swimming them through the surf with unimaginable skill, a green painted surf-boat at anchor outside the breakers making them fast to a buoyed hawser. He saw another hawser-load being heaved out to the steamer's winch, with the great casks popping about like a string of gigantic cherries. Already on the *M'poso* he had seen other puncheons howked on board by a steam-crane which was driven by a one-eared Krooboy.

He had grasped this much of his new trade when sight seemed to grow misty to him, and his body was chilled with an unpleasant perspiration. It is one thing to take one's regular meals on a fine-sized steamboat, whatever weather may befall; it is quite another to do one's voyaging in a leaping, lancing, dancing, wallowing surf-boat. Few men take their first surf-boat ride over a bad roll without being violently seasick, and Carter was no exception to the normal law.

In a hazy sort of way he noted that the paddlers had stopped their song and their monotonous effort, and he was seized with a tremendous desire to hurry them forward and get himself and his gladstone bags planted on the stable beach. Ahead of them were roaring, spouting breakers, which it seemed impossible for any boat to live through; but waiting outside their fringe was even more intolerable.

"Oh, get on! For Heaven's sake, get on!" he wanted to shout, but almost to his astonishment pride of race kept him grimly silent. He had never felt before the whole debt that is owing to a white skin.

The headman in the stern-sheets sculled now and again

with his oar to keep the boat head on to the roll, and between whiles chattered nervously. The Krooboy paddlers on the gunwales rested on their paddles and scratched themselves. Roller after roller went by, flinging the boat up towards heaven, sucking her back again to the sea grass below, with a rocking motion that was horrible beyond belief. Carter felt the color ebb from his cheeks; he wondered with a grisly humor if his head was paling also.

But at last the headman delivered himself of a shriek, and a galvanic activity seized the paddlers. They stabbed the water with their trident-shaped blades, and stabbed and stabbed again. The surf-boat was poised on the crest of a great mound of water, and they were straining every sinew to keep her there. But the water motion travelled more swiftly than the clumsy boat. She slid down the slope, still paddling frantically, and the following wave lifted her rudely by the tail. She reared dizzily almost to the vertical, the headman at the apex of the whole structure keeping his perch with an ape's dexterity.

She just missed being upset that time, and part of the water which she had shipped was flung over the gunwales as she righted. But she floated there half swamped: labor with what frenzy they choose, the iron-muscled Krooboys could not keep her under command; and the next roller sent the whole company of them flying.

There is one piece of advice constantly dinned into a white man's ear on the West Coast. "If in a surf-boat you see the boat boys jump overboard, jump yourself also if you do not wish to have the boat on top of you." Profoundly sound advice it is. But it has the disadvantage of presupposing capability for obedience, and if (as frequently happens) the passenger is dizzy and weak from sudden seasickness, then the leap may be neither prompt nor well-aimed.

As to where Carter's fault occurred, I have no certain information. The headman shrieked an order in his own barbarous tongue; the boat boys took to water on either side like so many black frogs; the boat spilt, flinging far two yellow gladstone bags and one limp passenger in soiled white ducks; and, look how one would into that boiling hell of broken water, no red head appeared.

On the glaring beach Swizzle-Stick Smith broke off from his overseeing for a moment, and limped down into the smoke of the surf. He had a chiquot in his hand, which is a whip made of the most stinging part of the hippopotamus, and with it he slashed venomously at every black form that scrambled out of the brine.

He screamed at them in their own tongue. "Get back, you black swine! Get back, and fetch out my clerk. If you drown my clerk, I will drown you, too. My last clerk died a year ago, and they have got me no other out here since. I won't lose this one. Back, you bushmen!"

The chiquot had many terrors to the Krooboys, the water few. It was as much out of forgetfulness as anything else that they had not brought their passenger to shore with them. Besides, how were they to know that he could not swim as well as themselves (that is, about as well as a seal can swim)? But they were not above striking a bargain for their services. A black head, served upon a white pother of creamy surf, gave tongue.

"Oh, Smith. You give cash, suppose we fit for catch 'im?"

"You lib for beach with my clerk, and I dash you one whole box of gin. Hurry up now, you thieves, or a shark will chop him, or else he'll drown."

Heads disappeared, and many pairs of black heels kicked upwards. The old man hitched together his shabby py-jamas, and stared industriously at the broken water through

his eyeglass. "It's all very well for this K. O'Neill to send out letters that the firm is going to double its business," he grumbled, "but if they don't send me men that can get ashore in one piece, how this factory at Malla-Nulla is going to buck up, I can't see. By Jove, they've got him, the beggars. Red-headed chap, too. Well, I might have saved that dash, I'm thinking. Men with red heads never seem to stand the climate here for long. It will be a nuisance if the beggar pegs out within the month, after I've spent a case of gin on him."

It was a very limp and bedraggled Carter that was brought ashore presently by the Krooboys. He was held up by the heels, *more Africano*, to let the Atlantic drain from his inside back into its proper place, but he did not show any sign of consciousness till he had been lifted up and carried to the shelter of the retail store.

Swizzle-Stick Smith limped beside him, puffing at his briar. "Beggar's got an arm broken," he commented. "Just my luck. And K. O'Neill will expect the work to be done just the same. Oh"—he said when the dripping Krooboys had put down his guest on the counter—"so you've concluded to come to your senses again?"

Carter shuddered and slowly opened his eyes. A brown cockroach, horrible with dust, dropped from the rafter above onto his face.

"I'm afraid you've had rather a rough bout of it, landing, my lad. It's a very bad beach to-day. There, don't move. You're all right. You'll feel a bit queer yet."

"The boat upset——"

"It did, most thoroughly. But you're now at Malla-Nulla factory in West Africa, and I bid you welcome. I'm Mr. Smith, your commanding officer. You'd like to lie still for a bit, perhaps?"

"Yes."

"Well, buck up, and you'll soon be all right. You

needn't fancy you'll be a candidate for a top-hat and a gun-case yet."

"For a which?"

The trader pointed with his pipe stem across the store to a wooden box full of flintlock trade guns. "That's a gun case. Man's usually too long to fit it comfortably, especially if he's as well-grown as you are. So we knock out one end, and nail on an old top-hat. Then you can plant him in style."

The patient's mouth twitched with the corner of a smile. "A most tidy custom," he said faintly. "But I say, could you do anything for my arm? Sorry to trouble you, but it's most abominably painful."

"Your arm's broken, worse luck. I'll set it for you when I've got off this cargo."

"I'd rather have a doctor. Will you send off to the *M'poso* for the doctor there, please?"

The old man laughed and polished his eyeglass on a sleeve of his pyjamas. My lad, you don't understand. You've left the steamer now, and her doctor's not the kind of fool to risk his own bones trying to get here with the beach as bad as it is to-day. I don't suppose he mistakes you for a millionaire. You came out in the second class, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Then there you are. His responsibility ended when you left the steamer, and ship's doctors don't come ashore on this Coast unless they're sure of touching a big fat fee. Now you must just lie quiet where you are, and bite on your teeth till I've some time for surgery. Trade comes first in West Africa."

With which naked truth, Swizzle-Stick Smith relit his pipe, and went out again into the brazen sunshine, and presently was hustling on the factory boys at their cargo work with his accustomed eloquence and dexterity.

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCES MISS LAURA SLADE

IF a white man in a West African factory volunteers details of his previous history, all hearers are quite at liberty to believe or disbelieve, as suits their whim; but if, on the other hand, no word about previous record is offered, Coast etiquette strictly rules that none shall be asked for.

George Carter found even upon the surface of his superior officer at Malla-Nulla factory much that was mysterious. There were moments when Mr. Smith exhibited an unmistakable gentility; but these were rare; and they usually occurred when the pair of them lunched *en tête-à-tête* at 11 o'clock, and Smith had worked off his morning qualm, and had not commenced his afternoon refreshment. With a larger audience he was one part cynic and six parts ruffian; he was admitted to be the most skilful compounder of cocktails on all that section of the West African seaboard; and he sampled his own brews in such quantities, and with such impunity, as gave the lie to all text-books on topical medicine.

His head was bald, and the gray hair on his face and above his ears was either as short as clippers could make it, or else bristled with a two weeks' growth. Day and night he wore more or less shrunken pyjamas, from the neck buttonhole of which a single eyeglass dangled at the end of a piece of new black silk ribbon. Carter guessed his age as somewhere between fifty and fifty-five, and wondered why on earth Messrs. O'Neill and Craven kept such a dis-

reputable old person as the head of what might have been a very prosperous factory.

Indeed, theories on this very point were already lodged in the older man's brain. "It's this new partner, K. O'Neill, that I don't like the sound of," he explained to Carter one day. "By the way, who is he?"

"Don't know. As I told you I was staying with my father at the vicarage, and I was engaged by wire the day before the *M'poso* sailed, and only caught her by the skin of my teeth. There was nobody there to see me off, and on the boat all they could tell me was that 'K.' came into the business when the late head died."

"Old Godfrey, that was"—Swizzle-Stick Smith sighed—"poor old Godfrey O'Neill! He was one of the best fellows going in the old days, not a bit like the usual cut of palm-oil ruffian as we used to call the traders then. And, my God! to think of my coming down to the grade of one of them myself."

Again the subject cropped up when one of their rare mails came in. "Here's expense!" grumbled Swizzle-Stick Smith. "Letters landed at our Monk River factory, and sent on to Mulla-Nulla by special runner. K. O'Neill's orders, the Monk River agent says. In the old days you could always bet on the beach being too bad for the steamer to call twice out of three times, and you weren't pestered with a mail more than once in six months. That's mainly why I've stuck by O'Neill and Craven all these years. Now this new man wants our output of kernels to be doubled by this time next year, and hopes I'll take steps to work up the rubber connection. If I can't see my way to do all this, will I kindly give my reasons in writing, and if necessary forward same by runner to a steamer's calling point, so that reply may be in Liverpool within six weeks at latest. What do you think of that?"

"Oh, I should say it was reasonable enough from the Liverpool point of view."

"Bah! There's not much of the Coast about you." He tore the letters into shreds, and folded these carefully into pipe-lights. "Dear old Godfrey trusted me up to the hilt, and this new fellow's got to learn to do the same, or I shall resign my commission. If he understood anything about running the office, he might know I should do all the work that was good for me."

"I'm sure you do," said Carter civilly. "I'm afraid I'm the slacker. You let me have such an easy time of it whilst my arm was getting well, that I've slid off into lazy ways. I must buck up, and if you'll load the work onto me, Mr. Smith, you'll find I can do a lot more."

Swizzle-Stick Smith dried the perspiration from his eye socket, fixed his glass into a firmer hold, and stared. "Well," he said at last, "you *are* a d—d fool." And there the talk ended.

It was that same day that Carter had his first introduction to Royalty. He was in the retail store—"feteesh," they call it on the Coast—weighing out baskets of palm kernels, measuring calabashes of orange-colored palm oil, judging as best he could the amount of adulterants the simple negro had added to increase the bulk, and apportioning the value in cotton cloth, powder, flintlock guns at twelve and sixpence apiece, and green cubical boxes of Holland gin. Trade proceeded solwly. The interior of the feteesh was a stew of heat and odors, and the white man's elaborate calculations were none of the most glib. To knock some idea of the fairness of these into the black man's skull was a work that required not only eloquence, but also athletic power. The simple savage who did only one day's shopping per annum was willing always to let the delights of it linger out as long as possible, and all the white man's

hustling could not drive the business along at more than a snail's pace.

By Coast custom, work for Europeans starts in those cool hours that know the daybreak, and switches off between eleven and twelve for breakfast; and thereafter siesta is the rule till the sun once more begins to throw a shadow. But on this particular day, when Swizzle-Stick Smith had knocked out his pipe and turned in under his mosquito bar, Carter sluiced a parrafin-can full of water over his red head by way of a final refreshment, and went down once more from the living rooms of the factory to the heat and the odors of the feteesh below.

The sweating customers saw him come and roused up out of the purple shadows, and presently the game of hagggle was once more in full swing.

Carter had a natural gift for tongues, and was picking up the difficult Coast languages to the best of his ability, but his vocabulary was of necessity small, and a Krooboy stood by to translate intricate passages into idiom more likely to penetrate the harder skulls. The Krooboy wore trousers and singlet in token of his advanced civilization, and bore with pride the name of White-Man's-Trouble.

There was a glut of customers that baking afternoon. High-scented trade stuffs poured into the factory in pleasing abundance, and bundles of European produce were balanced upon woolly craniums for transportation through bush paths to that wild unknown Africa beyond the hinterland. The new law of K. O'Neill allowed no lingering in the feteesh. Once a customer had been delivered of his goods, and had accepted payment, White-Man's-Trouble decanted him into the scalding sunshine outside, and bade him hasten upon his ways. K. O'Neill had stated very plainly, in a typewritten letter, that the leakage by theft was displeasing to the directorate in Liverpool, and must

be stopped. K. O'Neill understood that the thefts took place after a customer had spent all his cash on legitimate purchase, as then all his savage intelligence was turned to pilfering. Carter, as the man on the spot, recognized the truth of all this, and carried out the instructions to the foot of the letter.

Mr. Smith warned him he would have trouble over it. "Ever since the first factory came down to blight this Coast," Smith explained, "the boys have been allowed to hang around the feteesh and steal what wasn't nailed down. They look upon it in the light of a legitimate discount, and it's grown up into a custom. Now in West Africa you may burn a forest, or blot out a nation, or start a new volcano, and nobody will say very much to you, but if you interfere with a recognized custom, you come in contact with the biggest kind of trouble."

"Still," Carter pointed out, "these orders are definite."

"And you are the kind of fool that goes on the principle of 'obeying orders if you break owners.' Well, go ahead and carry out instructions. I won't interfere with you. I'd rather like to see this cocksure K. O'Neill get a smack in the eye to cure his meddling. And for yourself, keep your weather eye lifting, or some indignant nigger will ram a foot of iron into you. It's the Okky-men I'd take especial care of if I were you. They've got their tails up a good deal more than's healthy just now. I'm told, too, that their head witch doctor wants his war drum redecorated." Mr. Smith grinned—"I don't want to be personal, of course."

"Oh, don't mind me. So far I rather fail to understand what I've got to do with the Okky City war drum."

"You see you carry round with you something that would make the very best kind of heap-too-good ju-ju."

"Still I don't understand."

Swizzle-Stick Smith got up and stretched, and limped across to the door. "It's that red head of yours, my lad," he said over his shoulder as he went out. "Every witch doctor in West Africa that sees it will just itch to have it amongst his ornaments. I'd dye it sky-blue if I were you, just for safety sake."

This of course might be Mr. Smith's delicate irony, or again it might be literally true. Carter had already been long enough in West Africa to know that very unusual and unpleasant things can happen there; but that made no change in his determination. K. O'Neill was perfectly right about the matter; this pilfering ought to be stopped; and he felt convinced that White-Man's-Trouble would help to see that justice was done. That particular Krooboy was thievish himself, certainly, but he had a short way with any fellow African who dared to be light-fingered.

So during all that hot morning, and all that sweltering afternoon, merchant after merchant was shown out into the sunshine, and those who chattered and would not go willingly were assisted by the strong right arm of White-Man's-Trouble.

Just upon the time when siestas generally ended, that is, about four o'clock, there came a burly Okky trader who swaggered up to the factory with five carriers in his train laden down with bags of rubber.

Carter examined the evil smelling stuff, and cut open two or three of the larger round lumps. The gentle savage had put in quite thirty per cent. of sticks, and sand, and alien gum by way of makeweight, and was as petulant as a child at having this simple fraud discovered. He still further disliked the price that was offered; and when it came to making his purchases, and he found that the particular spot-white-on-blue cotton cloth on which he had built up his fancy was out of stock, the remaining rags of

his temper were frayed completely. For an unbroken ten minutes he cursed Carter, and Malla-Nulla factory, and an unknown Manchester skipper in fluent Okky, here and there embroidered with a few words of that slave-trader's Arabic, which is specially designed as a comfort for the impatient, and when he had accepted a roll of blue cloth spotted in another pattern, and was invited to leave the feteesh, he held himself to be one of the worst used Africans on the Dark Continent.

Carter, who was tired and hot, signed to his henchman. "Here, fire that ruffian out," he said.

But White-Man's-Trouble affected to hear a summons from outside. "Dat you, Smith? Yessar, I come one-time," said he, and bolted out through the doorway.

"Here you," said Carter to the big Okky-man, "you follow that Krooboy out of here. If I have to tell you a second time, there'll be trouble. Come, now, git."

Carter's command of the native might be faulty, but the grammar of his gestures was correct enough. What, go out of the feteesh before he chose? The Okky-man had no idea of doing such a thing. He lifted his walking spear threateningly, and snarled.

Simultaneously Carter put his right hand on the greasy counter and vaulted. He caught the upraised spear with his other hand before his feet had touched ground, and broke the blade close off by the socket; and a short instant later, when he had found a footing, he carried his weight forward in the same leap, and drove his right against the negro's left carotid, just beneath the ear. The man went down as if he had been pole-axed.

Carter went outside and beckoned to the Okky-man's carriers. "Here, you, come and carry your master outdoors"—the men hesitated—"or I'll start in to handle *you* next." They did as they were bidden. And thereupon

Carter, with his blood now well warmed up, was left free to attend to another matter elsewhere.

A noise of voices in disagreement, and the intermittent sounds of scuffling had made themselves heard from the south side of the factory buildings, and now there were added to these a woman's voice calling in English for some one to help her, and then a sharp, shrill scream of unmistakable distress.

Now, Carter was no knight-errant. He had set up the unknown K. O'Neill as his model, and had told himself daily that he intended to meddle with nothing in West Africa, philanthropic or otherwise, which would not directly tend to the advancement of George Carter; but at the first moment when they were put to the test, all these academic resolutions broke to pieces. He picked up his feet and ran at speed through the sunshine, and as he went a mist seemed to rise up before his eyes which tinged everything red.

He felt somehow as he had never felt before; strangely exhilarated and strangely savage; and when he arrived on the scene of the disturbance, he was little inclined to weigh the consequences of interference. There was a woman, white-faced and terror-stricken—he could not for the life of him tell whether she was handsome or hideous. Negroes were handling her. On the ground lay a pole hammock, in which presumably she had arrived. In front of her was a fat negro, over whose head a slave held a gaudy gold and red umbrella, and grouped around this fat one were eight or ten negro soldiers, with swords slung over their shoulders, and long flintlock trade guns in their hands.

The whole scene was, as I say, dished up to Carter's eyes in a red mist, and this thinned and thickened spasmodically so that sometimes he could see clearly what he was doing, and at other times he acted like a man bewitched. But

presently the red cleared away altogether, and he found himself clutching the fat negro by a twist of the shoulder cloth, and threatening to split his skull with a sword recently carried by one of the man's own escort. The girl sat limp and white on a green case before them, clearly on the edge of a faint, and round them all stood negro carriers and Hausa soldiery, frozen to inaction by the fat man's danger.

All human noises had ceased. Only the hot insect hum and the cool diapason of the Atlantic surf droned through the silence. From the dull upraised sword blade outrageous sunrays winked and flickered.

Upon this impasse came Swizzle-Stick Smith from the bush side of the white factory buildings, polishing his eyeglass, and limping along at his usual pace, and no faster. He removed his pipe, and wagged it at them.

"Upon my soul a most interesting picture! Just like a kid's fairy tale book. Gallant young knight rescuing distressed damosel from the clutches of wicked ogre, who incidentally happens to be the King of Okky as anyone but a born fool could have guessed from his state umbrella, and one of the firm's best customers. Kindly observe that I'm the good fairy who always comes in on the last page to put things safe. Carter, I prithee sheath thy virgin sword, and then for God's sake run away and drown yourself."

He had reached the group by this time, and took up in his own the damp black hand of offended majesty, and shook it heartily. He broke out in a stream of fluent Okky, and gradually the potentate's wrath melted. The King still gesticulated violently, and apparently demanded Carter's red head upon a charger as a prelude to truce, but Swizzle-Stick Smith was an old Coaster and knew his man.

"Champagne," Mr. Smith kept on suggesting, "bubbly champagne with plenty of Angostura bitters in it to make

it bite. I call attention to your Majesty's historic thirst. Come up into the factory, old Tintacks, and we'll break up a case in honor of the day."

Finally the King, who being a West African king was necessarily a shrewd man, decided that though vengeance would keep till another day, Mr. Smith's champagne might not; and he let himself be led back to the factory, and up the stair. He graciously accepted the most solid-looking of the long chairs in the veranda, sat in it carefully, kicked off his slippers, and tucked his feet beneath him. He waved away Mr. Smith's further speech. "Oh, Smith," he said, "I fit for champagne-palaver, one-time," and loosened the tuck of his ample waist-cloth to give space for the expected cargo. "No damn use more talk-palaver now."

Outside in the sunlight the Hausa soldiers had taken the cue from their master, and dissolved away unobtrusively; the carriers were dismissed to the Krooboys' quarters under the charge of White-Man's-Trouble, who, now that the disturbance was over, bustled up with many protestations of sorrow for his unavoidable absence, and Carter was left for further attendance on his distressed damsel.

For the first time he found himself able to regard her critically; and he was somehow rather disturbed to find before him a girl who was undeniably beautiful. When he had rushed blindly in to the rescue, he had taken it for granted that the person he saw so vaguely through that red mist was an English or an American missionary woman in distress, and (to himself) excused his mad lust for battle by picturing himself as the champion of the Christian martyr beset by pagans.

The white missionary women of that strip of the Coast occasionally quartered themselves at Malla-Nulla factory on their journeyings, in spite of the very niggardly civility of Mr. Smith, and Carter had been much impressed in the

way beneficent Nature had safeguarded them by homely features and unattractive mien from attack by the other sex. He could have taken off his hat to one of these, and said:

"Most happy to have been of service to you, madam. Won't you come into the factory and have a cup of tea?"

But this slim beauty in the frilled white muslins sent speech further and further away from him the more that he looked at her. For the first time since landing in Africa six months before he was ashamed of mildew-stained py-jamas for afternoon wear, and disgusted with the yellow smears of palm oil which bedaubed them. He was hatefully aware too that he had let his razors rust in the moist Coast climate, and White-Man's-Trouble's fortnightly efforts with the clippers had merely left his chin and head covered with an obscene red bristle.

". . . It would be ridiculous," the girl was murmuring, "merely to say 'thank you' for what you did, Mr. Carter. You see I know your name. News about newcomers soon spreads amongst the other factories on the Coast here. If you only knew how I dread that fearful King, you would understand my gratitude. You see this isn't the first time he's tried to carry me off."

"I wish you'd mentioned it earlier," Carter blurted out, "and I'd have split his dirty skull, trade or no trade."

She shook her head. "No, that wouldn't have done. There's the law to be thought of even here. Besides, he's a King, and could let loose, so they say, twenty thousand fighting men against the Coast factories, and wipe them out. If only I could get away to some place he couldn't reach!" She shivered. "If I stay on here at my father's factory, I'm bound to be caught and taken to Okky City."

Carter's brown eyes opened in sheer surprise. "You speak of your father's factory. Do you mean to say that you live here on the Coast?"

"At the Smooth River factory."

"What, Slade's place?"

"Yes, I'm Laura Slade. Couldn't you guess?"

"How could I?" Carter blurted out. "Mr. Smith told me that Slade's girl—" And there he stopped, and could have bitten off his tongue for having said so much.

She finished his sentence quietly, and, as it appeared, without resentment. "Mr. Smith, I suppose, described me as a nigger."

Carter made no reply. His brown eyes hung upon her pretty face intently.

"Mr. Smith, of course, knew my father, and my mother, too, for that matter, before I was born. My mother was a quadroon, and that makes me, you see, one-eighth African."

"You did not arrange your pedigree any more than I did mine. If you hadn't told me, I should never have guessed you weren't a full-blooded European. And after all, what does it matter?"

"There speaks the man who has only been out on the Coast six months."

"Six months or six years," said Carter stoutly, "makes no difference so far as I am concerned. We're neighbors, it appears, and I hope you will let me be one of your friends. Miss Slade, will you take compassion on a very lonely man and let him come over to Smooth River occasionally and see you? I can't tell you how ghastly the loneliness has been with only the Krooboy and Mr.—er—Swizzle-Stick Smith to talk to, though perhaps you can guess at it by the way I've let my outward man run to seed."

She gave him her slim brown hand. "I take frankly what you offer," she said. "If you let me become your friend, I shall count myself fortunate; you see, after what you have done for me to-day we can hardly start from the ordinary basis."

From there onwards their talk flowed easily. She had come over on a business errand for her father, and Carter settled that quickly and promptly. She went presently into the factory to rest after her long hammock ride, and Carter seized upon the chance to dive into his own room. Therefrom he emerged an hour later with a chin half-raw from recent shaving with a rusty razor, and wearing creased white drill clothes and a linen collar that sawed his neck abominably.

"I've arranged," he said, when next he saw her, "that you and I dine *tête-à-tête*, if you don't mind, down under those palm trees yonder. The mosquitos don't trouble down there just at sunset, and my boy, White-Man's-Trouble, only tastes things when they're going back to the cook house. It's mere prejudice to say he's had his filthy paw in every dish before it comes to me. Oh, by the way, Mr. Smith and his Majesty of Okky ask you to excuse them, as they have still more business to discuss before they can break up their meeting."

She laughed and understood him to a nicety. They slipped off into light easy talk as though they had known one another all their lives, and there was neither that narrow escape from tragedy behind them, nor Africa and possible tragedy ahead. The girl was good comrade. The man was hardly that. He too frankly devoured her with his eyes. And certainly, in her cool, frilled muslin dress, and her big green sun hat she was pretty enough to paint. Her hair was black assuredly, but her pale olive face was moulded in curves of the most delicious. In England, and as an Englishwoman, she would have been dark perhaps, though not noticeably so. Nine hundred and ninety-nine English people out of the thousand would have commented on her beauty only. In America—well, in America, she would at once have been placed in that class apart.

But Carter, the recently imported Englishman, saw nothing save only her beauty and her charm, and he behaved towards her as the English gentleman behaves towards his equal. A man who had been longer in Africa would have had the wisdom of one who had lived in the Southern States, and have picked out the African blood at a glance, and, as is the way of men who have eaten of the tree of that wisdom, would have ordered his civilities accordingly.

KATE MEREDITH, FINANCIER

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"I've arranged," he said, when next he saw her, "you and I dine *tête-à-tête*, if you don't mind, down those palm trees yonder. The mosquitos don't trouble there just at sunset, and my boy, White-Man's-Trou, tastes things when they're going back to the pot. It's mere prejudice to say he's had his filthy porridge dish before it comes to me. Oh, by the way, and his Majesty of Okky ask you to excuse them. I have still more business to discuss before they close their meeting."

She laughed and understood him to a great extent. She slipped off into light easy talk as though they were one another all their lives, and there was no more to row escape from tragedy behind them, nor any possible tragedy ahead. The girl was good enough to be hardly that. He too frankly dived into her eyes. And certainly, in her cool, frilled eyes, her big green sun hat she was pretty enough. Her hair was black assuredly, but her pale olive skin in curves was a most delicious. In the

CHAPTER III

THE KING WHO STOPPED THE ROADS

MR. SMITH was unsteady neither of speech nor foot, but an expert could have diagnosed that he had been dining. The expert, however, unless he had acquired his expertness near Malla-Nulla factory, would hardly have guessed that Mr. Smith was the better (or worse) for at least half a case of German champagne, generously laced with Angostura bitters.

He limped into Carter's bedroom, put his lamp down on the table, sat on the chair beside the mosquito bar, and very carefully eased up the knees of his shrunk pyjamas.

"I say, Mr. Assistant, wake up."

Carter woke, and blinked at the glare of Mr. Smith's eyeglass.

"Don't get up, please. I apologize for waking you, my dear fellow, but since you turned in, you've been made a pawn in the great game of diplomacy. The fate of empires trembles on your nod."

Carter roused up onto his elbow. "Don't you think the empires would tremble no more if we left them over till to-morrow morning?"

"It would be most undiplomatic to leave them trembling too long. I can tell you I have had a devilish hard time of it putting his Majesty to sleep. He can carry his liquor like a man, and he'd a most royal way of seeing I drank level with him. But he may wake up any minute. Put not your trust in the sleep of kings, Mr. Carter."

"All right, sir. I'll make a note of that. I'll brew the gasolene, and when the King wakes I'll stand by with soda-water and fusel oil, which I should think will heal the breach between us."

"Don't you believe it for one instant. The King of Okky's a seasoned vessel with a copper tummy, and you could no more thaw the wickedness out of him with soda-water than you could bring the devil to a reformed temperature in an ice machine. You must recognize, Mr. Carter, that both the King of Okky and the devil have their little ways, and it's above your art to change either of them very much. Question is, how much allegiance do you think you owe to O'Neill and Craven?"

This was a change of front with a vengeance. But Carter took it coolly enough. "That's an interesting point, sir. I hadn't reckoned it up before. But I shouldn't like to give you an answer to so important a question about the firm on the spur of the moment. So by your leave, I'll sleep over it, and tell you in the morning."

"Sorry, but can't allow you the time, and as you don't seem to grasp the fact, I must point out that the fate of this factory of O'Neill and Craven's at Malla-Nulla depends on the august will of the King of Okky. His Portliness also threatens to stop the roads which feed our other factories at Monktown and Smooth River, though I don't think when it comes to the point he'll do that. However, Burgoyne and Slade must see to those themselves. After the way this new K. O'Neill's been treating me on paper, I'm not going to concern myself with the general welfare of all the firm's factories on this coast. But I am in charge of Malla-Nulla, and I'm going to preserve the trade here from extinction if it can be managed."

Carter lifted the mosquito bar and got out of bed. "I'm afraid, sir, I must ask you to come down to my level, and speak rather more plainly."

Swizzle-Stick Smith sat back resignedly in his chair, and dropped his eyeglass to the end of its black watered silk ribbon. "*Dulce et decorum est pro factoria mori*, though I don't suppose it will come to dying if you play your cards right." Mr. Smith closed his eyes and evidently imagined that he was uttering his next thought silently. "Keep the young beggar out of the way of Slade's girl, too. By Gad, I'd no idea Laura would grow up such a pretty child. If he'd been an ordinary clerk I wouldn't have minded, but the lad's a gentleman by birth, and now he's done the gallant rescue business as a start, he's just the sort of quixotic young ass to think he ought to go and marry the girl as a proper capping for the romance. And that of course would be the end of him socially."

"I say," Carter called out loudly, "Mr. Smith, do you know it's four o'clock in the morning, and there are some dangerous chills about just now? Don't you think you had better have a cigarette paper full of quinine by way of a night cap, and then go to bed? It will be turning-out time in another hour or so."

"Matches, please. My pipe's out. Ah, thank you, Mr. Carter. Well, as I was saying, the King's awfully taken with that punkah you rigged for the mess-room, and the water wheel you set up in the river to run it, and when I showed him the native arrowheads, and the spears, and the execution axes you'd made to sell to the curiosity shops at home, he began to change his tune. By the time we'd got to the fifth bottle he'd given up asking for your head in a calabash to take home with him, and before we'd finished the case he'd offered you the post of Chief Commissioner of Works in Okky City, with a salary in produce and quills of gold that'll work out to £1,000 a year."

"That's very flattering."

"Yes, isn't it, when you remember how he started. The

only question is, will he keep his royal word when he's sober?"

"It's a nice point. Among other things I believe they're cannibals up in Okky City."

"Oh, come now, Mr. Assistant, you mustn't malign my friend, the King, too much. You need have no fears on that score. The Okky men have never been known to eat anybody with a red head. The only thing you'd have to funk would be sacrifice—with, of course, a most full and impressive ceremony. So I think you'll go, eh? All for the sake of K. O'Neill, whom you admire so much? And then the King won't stop the roads."

"No," said Carter shortly. "I have no intention of committing suicide at present. But if I'm an embarrassment at Malla-Nulla, you may fire me, or I'll resign if you wish it."

Swizzle-Stick Smith screwed his eyeglass into place and examined his assistant with thoughtful care. "Shouldn't dream of letting you go, my dear fellow. Always make a point of sticking by my officers. Just thought I'd let you know of the King's offer in case his Majesty refers to it to-morrow. There now, go to bed again, and don't dream the fighting's begun. You'll see plenty of service over this affair without dreaming over it on ahead."

When Carter set out for the West Coast of Africa from the Upper Wharfedale Vicarage, the one article in his kit which he thought suitable for the Coast was a small-bore nickel-plated revolver, which he had picked up second hand in Skipton for ten and six. It had been smuggled in without his mother's knowledge, as there was no reason to add to her already great anxiety. His father had provided half a sovereign towards the cost, had advised him not to use the wretched thing except in case of necessity, but if need arose, to take heed that he held it straight.

Of course on arrival he found, firstly, that the weapon was too small to be of effective use; secondly, that he could not hit a mark six feet square at more than a twelve-yard rise; and, thirdly, that revolvers are not really articles of fashionable wear for clerks in West Coast factories, whatever they may be in story-books. So the weapon lay in his mouldy portmanteau, and the moist Coast climate changed its nickel dress for a good coat of bright red rust.

But the morning after the King of Okky's arrival, while that bulky potentate was still asleep in the factory, Carter went in, cleaned the revolver as well as he could, and jammed cartridges into its reluctant chambers. He carried it pirate-fashion for the remainder of that day inside the band of his trousers, to his great personal discomfort, and to the vast enjoyment of Mr. Smith. However, the truculent Okky soldiers who had deliberately shaken weapons at him in the morning were reduced by the sight of it to a certain surly civility, and work in the feteesh went on without any open rupture.

Mr. Smith was distinctly irritable when dawn came in with the morning tea, but presently, when the swizzle-stick began its merry swishing in the cocktail pitcher, he thawed into a pleasing geniality, which, by frequent application of the same remedy, endured throughout the day. Laura Slade had returned in her hammock by the beach road in the cool of the preceding night, and Carter's thoughts followed her to Smooth River factory, to the detriment of his work down in the feteesh. He gave no mental attention whatever to the King of Okky who sat cross-legged in a long chair in the factory veranda above him, but that bulky potentate kept returning with a dogged persistency to the subject of George Carter.

"Oh, Smith," he kept on saying, "I savvy champagne palaver, n' I savvy cocktail palaver, n' I fit for chop when

chop-time lib. But I ask you for tell me, one-time, if you fit for dash me dem Red-head that savvies machine-palaver. If you no fit, I stop dem road, an' no more trade lib for Malla-Nulla."

To which Mr. Smith, who knew his West Africa from a twenty-five years' study of its men and customs, would reply with an unruffled geniality that he was sure the King was far too good a heathen to try any such dirty game as putting ju-ju on the factory of an old friend. "You're pulling my leg, old Cockiwax," Mr. Smith would say. "I pray you cease, and you shall have the best cocktail this pagan Coast has seen or sniffed."

"Oh, Smith," the King would say, "I fit," and thereafter there would be truce till the houseboy brought the ingredients, and Mr. Smith with his far-famed skill compounded them, and the pink cocktails went their appointed journey to perform their accustomed work. After which the African would once more repeat his unwearied demand.

From the rising of the King from his mat, to the hour of the midday meal, this demand and reply went on, and Swizzle-Stick Smith parried it with unruffled serenity. But an open rupture very nearly came at the meal time. As a king, the visitor was invited to sit at meat with the white men in their mess-room. He said little during the meal, but he appraised Carter's head so persistently with his eyes that that irritated young man, with the pride of race bubbling within him, would have openly resented the performance if he had not given a promise to Mr. Smith on this very point only a short half-hour before.

Such a state of things could not last long without bringing about an open breach, and Swizzle-Stick Smith, with his vast experience, saw this earlier than anybody, and made his arrangements accordingly.

He tried hard to write a letter, but his pen was not in the mood for intelligent calligraphy. So he had to fall back on verbal instructions and a verbal message.

"Mr. Assistant," he said, when at last he put down his knife and fork, and the houseboy handed him his pipe and a match, "Mr. Assistant, I intended to make you a bearer of dispatches, but the gout's got into my confounded fingers this morning, and I doubt if even Slade could read my writing. So we'll just have to do the thing informally. We must have some more of that spot-white-on-blue cloth, and you must post off to the Smooth River factory and bring it back with you. It seems to be in heavy demand just now, though why, I can't imagine. I've been on the Coast twenty-five years now, and I can no more foretell the run of native fashions than I could the day I landed. But there it is, and though I'm sure Slade won't want to part, you must just make him. Say we'll pay him back in salt. He's sure to be short of salt. I never yet knew Slade to indent for half as many bags of salt as his trade required. You needn't hurry. If you're back here in three days' time that will be quite soon enough. You can take a hammock, of course."

"Thanks, very much, but I'd rather walk."

"Well, just as you please. You must commandeer what carriers you want from Slade."

So it came to pass that when the sun had dropped to a point whence it could throw a decent shadow, and the sea breeze mingled a bracing chill even into a temperature of eighty, Carter set off along the beach, with White-Man's-Trouble balancing a mildew-mottled Gladstone bag on his smartly-shaved cranium, in attendance. On one side of him Africa was fenced off by a wall of impenetrable greenery; on the other the Atlantic bumped and roared and creamed along the glaring sand. On the horizon the smoke

of a Liverpool palm oil tank called from him the usual Coaster's sigh.

"Oh, Carter," said his valet when they had left the factory buildings well out of earshot, "you plenty-much fine, and you no lib for steamah."

"It was about time I tidied up. When we get back to the factory I'll teach you how to pipe-clay shoes."

The Krooboy thought over this proposition for some minutes. Then said he: "I fit for tell you, Carter, dem last white man I pipe-clay shoes for, he lib for cemetery in two week. Savvy, Carter? Two week."

"All right, don't get so emphatic. I wasn't doubting you. But I'm going to risk the cemetery all the same. You may start by providing me with one pair of clean shoes a day, and when I get the taste of cleanliness again, maybe I'll run to two. Savvy?"

"Savvy plenty," grumbled White-Man's-Trouble, and then presently. "You no fit for steamah palaver? You no lib for home?"

"No, I'm not going home yet awhile."

"But you plenty-much fine."

"Yes," admitted Carter, "I caught sight of myself in mildewed pyjamas and a fortnight's beard, and was struck with the general filthiness of my personal appearance. Savvy?"

"Savvy plenty. Oh, Carter, you lib for wife-palaver? Dem plenty-much fine clothes always one of the customs before wife-palaver."

The Krooboy pondered over this discovery during the next two miles of the march, and then said he, "Oh, Carter?"

"Well?"

"Dem Slade. You savvy seegar?"

"I suppose so. Why?"

"I see Smith dash dem Slade one box seegar an' he got what Slade said 'no fit' for before. Oh, Carter, you dash dem Slade one box seegar," said White-Man's-Trouble, and he treated his employer to a knowing wink.

"Whatever for?"

"Because then, after he got dem seegar, he sell you Laura for half dem price he ask before."

"You're an impertinent savage," said Carter half tickled, half annoyed.

But White-Man's-Trouble stopped, put down the yellow Gladstone bag on the baking sand, and pointed to the blue parallel tribal tattoo marks between his brows. "I Krooboy, sar. I no bushboy, sar! I lib for educate as deckboy an' stan'-by-at-crane boy on steamah, sar. I no fit for stay with you, sar, if you call me impertinent savage."

Carter stared. "Good heavens, man! I didn't intend to hurt your feelings."

White-Man's-Trouble waved the bleached inside of his paw towards his master. "Oh, Carter, you apologize. Palaver set." He bowed a head which was quaintly shaved into garden patches, replaced the Gladstone bag on its central bed of wool, and once more strode cheerfully ahead.

Carter followed moodily. How had they all guessed at his admiration for Laura? He had thought it the most intimate of secrets, a delicate confidence that he had no more than dared breathe even to his own inner consciousness. But first old Smith had blurted it out, and now even his servant talked about it openly. He had no doubt whatever that the whole thing had been fully discussed over the cooking fires of the native compound at Malla-Nulla the night before.

Then somehow his eyes swung round to the dancing horizon, and the Liverpool steamer's smoke, boring up towards the North, easily ferried his thoughts across the

gap which lay between that baking African beach, and the cool village tucked snugly in beneath the Upper Wharfedale moors. He tried to concentrate his mind on the roses in the vicarage garden. His mother liked abundance of blooms, and cared little about the size. The Vicar admired big blooms and snipped off superfluous buds when his wife was out of the way, and during summer a gentle wrangle over the roses was quite one of the features of their quiet life.

But the roses refused to stay in the centre of the picture. Laura insisted on taking their place. Suppose he took Laura back to Wharfedale—as Mrs. George Carter. His mother, blessed woman, might be sorry, but she would accept her. He was sure of that. But his father? Almost the last piece of advice the Vicar had given on parting was:

“Now, lad, remember always you’re a white man, and don’t get mixed up with any woman who owns a single drop of blood darker than your own. If you do, you can never come back here, and you’ll hate yourself all the rest of your life. Remember I held an Indian chaplaincy before I got this living, and I know what I’m talking about.”

Carter shook a sudden fist at the steamer’s smoke for supplying him with such a distasteful train of thought, and turned for light conversation to White-Man’s-Trouble. That garrulous person was quite ready to humor him in the matter.

The sea breeze died away a little after six, and they marched in breathless heat till the cool land breeze took its place, and brought them spicy odors of the inland trees. And always on one side of them the surf roared, and crashed, and creamed along the beaches.

The sun drooped to the horizon and hurried beneath it in visible inches of fall. Daylight went out. The colors

were blotted from the sky, and the stars lit up, one racing another to be first. The noises from the forest changed in correspondence. From close at hand a leopard roared a greeting to the darkness.

Night was fully dressed ten minutes after the sun had vanished. It was after nine o'clock, and in the chill of a wet gray mist, that they reached O'Neill and Craven's factory on the banks of Smooth River.

Now nine o'clock in the lonely factories of the Coast is usually bed time, and Carter was a good deal surprised to hear the hum of a great activity pulsing out into the night; and presently, when they came within eye-range, to see the buildings aglow with lights. But there was a further surprise packed and ready for him. As they came close, a black man leaned over the end of an upraised wall of palm oil puncheons, and deliberately pointed a gun squarely at Carter's chest.

A good deal of discussion took place afterward as to what would have been the proper procedure under the circumstances, but that may conveniently be omitted from this record, which deals only with immediate history; and the fact is that Carter rushed the sentry, clipped him under the ear, skinned his own knuckles, and captured the gun. White-Man's-Trouble in the meanwhile had with much presence of mind thrown himself on his face to avoid any discharge of pot-leg from the concealed marksmen, and was bawling lustily for "Slade, oh Slade," to "Stop dem dam gun-palaver." Which noisy request presently had its wished for result.

Slade himself came out to meet them, and even then his reception was sufficiently startling. "Good God!" he rapped out, "then you've escaped, too, Carter, as well as the Krooboy. What liars these niggers are! I imagined that your—that parts of you were up at Okky City by now.

I supposed they've scuppered poor old Swizzle-Stick Smith all right, though? Did he have a bad time of it? Why?" he said as he came nearer, and saw his caller's spruce get-up, "you don't look as if you'd been scrapping much. Or bolting very hard, either," he added as an afterthought.

"Unless," said Carter, "you're referring to an invasion by the Turks, or the French, or the Men in the Moon, I haven't a notion what you're talking about."

"Haven't you come from Malla-Nulla?"

"Left there about a quarter to four."

"And hasn't it been sacked?"

"It was sitting down by the beach, looking just as white hot as usual, and no more, when I left."

"What about the King of Okky, then?"

"He was there at Malla-Nulla, filling a very big chair on the veranda."

"And there has been no raid? I don't understand."

"The King of Okky," said Carter patiently, "has raided our factory to the extent of one case of fizz, of which Mr. Smith says he drank half, but barring that, and about six gallons of other mixed drinks, I didn't see him get much out of us. He certainly was threatening to stop the roads when I left, but I think that was all gas. He only wanted to stick Mr. Smith for more drinks."

"He's stopped the roads right enough."

"Not he," said Carter cheerfully.

The older man thought a minute and then, "Come along with me," he said. "I guess ocular demonstration is about the only thing that will convince you that there is mischief in the air, and that that crafty old devil of a king is at the bottom of it." He led to a factory outbuilding, threw open a door, and scraped a match. "Look in there."

Carter did so, and promptly felt sick, and came out. But he got another light and returned resolutely to the

inspection. "Two, four, seven. And all killed the same way. I say that's pretty ghastly."

"Isn't it? They were all fine healthy Krooboys when they marched out of here this morning, carrying up some salt bags to our sub-factory on the Okky road. There were some bits of feathers and a rag or two strung up alongside the path, and they didn't notice them, or didn't tumble to it that they were ju-ju. Consequently they are now what you see. This is the King of Okky's way of hinting that the road is stopped. That pot-leg must have been fired at not more than a two-yard range. Some of the poor devils are regularly blown inside out. Here, come into the open again."

"Thanks, you needn't give me the details over again. I saw all that for myself."

"That infernal King must have sent off his messengers the very moment after you had that turn-up with him about Laura—which, by the way, is a thing that I personally shall never forget, so you can draw on me over that down to the last breeches button. You see Okky City is closer in at the back here, but it's quite five hours' march further from Malla-Nulla. So the treacherous old brute stayed where he was, tippling with Smith, in the pious hope of keeping you all quiet till his men could come down and blot you all out. How you got through is a marvel to me. They must have reckoned on getting you as you walked here along the beach or they'd never have let you slip away. You and your boy have certainly escaped by the skin of your teeth. It's a moral certainty that they've got old Smith."

"I don't think so. But I shall go back and see."

"Rubbish! We may be able to hold out here, and perhaps will not be attacked at all when they find out we're ready for them. But it's perfectly impossible for you to

get back along the beach to Malla-Nulla. Come up into the house, and we'll find you a bite of something to eat, and Laura shall mix you a whiskey and soda. We've a bit of the last steamer's ice still left, and you shall have it."

"Thanks. I'll come up and see Miss Slade, but I shall start back for Malla-Nulla in half an hour from now. And if, as you prophesy, I don't land, well, at any rate, I shall have done my best to get there."

"It's very nice of you, and all that, but do you think old Smith is worth it?"

Carter laughed. "Mr. Smith's a rough handful, but he's a good sort, and I like him. Besides he happens to be a gentleman."

"Or was one once. A lot of us on the Coast were gentlemen originally. I come of good people myself, and was at Eaton and Jesus, although I don't suppose you'd have guessed it if I hadn't told you. But you see Nature built me with a cutaway chin, and I couldn't hold down a job at home. However, come in, and we'll scratch you up some chop. Here, Laura, I've brought a caller."

"I feel this dreadful trouble is all my fault," said the girl as they came into the lamplit room. "If you had been killed, Mr. Carter, I should have looked upon myself as a murderess."

"My dear Miss Slade, you really mustn't worry about a matter you've no concern in whatever. The whole thing's a 'regrettable incident'—I believe that's the proper term—that Mr. Smith told me has been brewing for years. It's all due to the drop in the price of palm oil on the Liverpool market, which means that we white traders pay less for it on the Coast here, and the black traders get less, and so there's less for the King of Okky to squeeze out of them as they march through his territory from the hinterland. That's what's put his fat back up. The only great

mistake that's been made is that I didn't split the old brute's iniquitous skull when I had the chance. I say, do you mind my commenting on those flowers you've got on the table? I haven't seen a cut flower since I left England."

He turned to his host. "You do the thing rather palatially here, Mr. Slade. Board walls and real glass in the windows! We've bamboo walls at Malla-Nulla that let in the dust and the mosquitoes and the Krooboy's stares just as they occur. It felt rather like living in a bird-cage till one got used to it."

"The walls are Laura's doing. You know she was at school in a convent in Las Palmas, and came home with all sorts of extravagant notions. Why, she actually insisted on a tablecloth for meals, and napkins. I'll trouble you, napkins! And yet they still call us palm oil ruffians in Liverpool, and firmly believe that we live on orange-colored palm oil chop, which we pick out of calabashes with our fingers. I sent K. O'Neill a photograph of this room by the last mail, with the table laid for chop, and flowers as you see in a china bowl, in the hope he'd be impressed by it, and raise my screw."

"He's quite likely to do it, too," said Carter, "if I understand Mr. K. right. He's always insisting in his letters to Malla-Nulla that if we make ourselves comfortable, and adapt ourselves to the climate, we shall be able to do more and better work. By the way, do you know Mr. K. O'Neill at all? At Malla-Nulla we only know him on paper."

"I'm in the same box," Slade confessed. "Godfrey, his predecessor, of course I knew well enough. But this new chap I only know from his letters, and they're a deal too rousing for my easy-going tastes. Ah, here's the boy with a tray of chop for you. Observe the parsley; that's Laura's

latest triumph in Coast gardening. Boy, Mr. Carter will sleep in the spare bed in my room. See that there are no live things inside the mosquito bar."

"I thank you," said Carter firmly, "but I am going to do as I said."

"He wants to go back to Malla-Nulla," Slade explained to his daughter, "and I tell him it is suicide to think of such a thing. Here, you have a go at him, Laura." Slade always put off onto someone else anything which he found hard to do himself.

But Laura Slade read a certain doggedness in Carter's face that told her what to say. She did not join in imploring him to stay at Smooth River when he had so obviously determined to go. But instead, her mind flew to some scheme that might make his passage less desperately risky. "I am sure father could spare you some men. With an escort you might get through. I wish you were not so plucky."

Carter laughed. "Oh, I am frightened hard enough, but I should be still more frightened at what I should think of myself if anything happened to Mr. Smith which I could have prevented if I'd been there. It's very kind of you to offer an escort, and I'd thought of that before; but I'm sure I shall be able to move quicker and more quietly without one. But if Mr. Slade could lend me a gun, I'd feel a lot more comfortable with that."

"Certainly, my boy, certainly. You shall have my Winchester, and I believe I can scare up a revolver somewhere."

"You are very good. I have a revolver already, but it's only useful to me as a sort of knuckleduster. I couldn't hit a haystack with it ten yards off. Same with the rifle; I've never used one. But where I was brought up in Wharfedale, you see, the Governor had some glebe, and his income was small. We mostly lived on rabbits and a few

grouse in the season, and so you see I learned to be pretty useful with a shot gun."

Slade handed a weapon. "There you are. That's a double 12-bore hammer gun, and both barrels are cylinders. It's an early Holland and was a swell tool in its day, which was some time ago."

"Thank you very much. I hope I shan't have to use it, but it'll feel comfortable under my arm. When you've lived most of your life in the country, you miss going out with a gun. Well, now, I'll say good-by."

"Wait a minute till we've called up your boy. I'll shout from the veranda."

"Don't, please," said Carter, remembering that on all previous occasions when trouble foreboded White-Man's-Trouble disappeared. He did not wish to call Laura's attention more than necessary to the risks of the journey. "I'd far rather go alone."

"Oh, Carter," said the voice of the Krooboy from the darkness outside, "then you plenty-much dam fool. I say I lib for come with you to Malla-Nulla. You no fit to go by your lone."

They looked out through the lit doorway and saw the yellows of White-Man's-Trouble's eyes, and the gleam of his teeth, which latter were eclipsed when he finished his speech, leaving the eyes alone to tell of his whereabouts.

"Now, that's a real stout boy of yours, Carter," the trader said. "Hi you, come in. You fit for a peg?"

"I fit for a bottle," said White-Man's-Trouble, who looked nipped and gray when he stood up in the lamp-light. Poor fellow, he thought he was going to certain death with perhaps torture as an addition, but when it came to a pinch, and the white man led, he screwed up his pluck to follow.

So at last the pair of them set off quietly into the

· shadows. Two handshakes were all the farewell, but there was a soft something in Laura's eyes that sent queer thrills down George Carter's spine. Slade himself saw them through the outer line of the sentries, and warned those enthusiasts not to fire on them should they presently return; and a dozen yards away from those sentries, they melted into the warm blackness of the African night.

Up on the veranda of the factory Laura Slade leaned over the rail and listened to the beating of her own heart. She strained her eyes and she strained her ears along the line of mysterious phosphorescence which marked the beach, but no trace or hint did she get of how it fared with the man she loved. Once only during that watch did she hear a sound which she took to be a distant gunshot, and then, *din, din*, as though two other shots followed it. Then the roar of the surf and the night noises of Africa closed in again, and for safety or hurt Carter had passed beyond her reach.

"Kate will like that man," she said to herself, and then she shivered a little. "I wonder if Kate will take him away from me?"

CHAPTER IV

THE BEACH BY MOONLIGHT

WHITE-MAN'S-TROUBLE was abominably frightened during that night march along the beach to Malla-Nulla, and did not mind showing it. Indeed, the fact that he screwed up his determination sufficiently to make the trip at all, says a great deal for his admiration of Carter.

Carter, on the other hand, though he was fully alive to the desperate risks that lay ahead, felt himself to be the white man in command, and adjusted his demeanor accordingly. To look at him one might have thought that he was merely taking exercise and the evening air for the general good of his health.

Had there been cover he would have taken it, but there was none. The beach was the only path; the bush which walled it on one side was impassable, and though the sea might have been considered an alternative route, they had only cotton-wood dug-outs at the Smooth River factory, and it would have taken at least a surf-boat to get out over the Smooth River bar, to say nothing of landing, when the time came, through the rollers which crashed always on Malla-Nulla beach. So he marched along where the sand was wet and hard, just above the cream of surf, and he carried the twelve-bore, hammers downwards, over his shoulder, with his forefinger on the trigger guard above. He was very grateful for those past days of rabbit shooting in Upper Wharfedale which had taught him to be so quick and deadly on a sudden mark.

The surf on one side, and the night noises of Africa on the other, roared in their ears as they marched, and every now and again they came into a cloud of fireflies, which switched their tiny lamps in and out with inconceivable rapidity, and left them quite blinded during the intervals of darkness.

So that on the whole, as Carter realized very fully, if the King of Okky had set men to waylay them, these could scarcely be incompetent enough to miss their mark. But he did not admit this knowledge to White-Man's-Trouble. When that Krooboy stated things exactly as they were, Carter pooh-poohed his deductions lightly enough, and stormed at the man because he was ignorant of the most approved method of pipe-claying shoes.

An African moon floated cleanly overhead, and great African stars punctured the purple roof of heaven, and to Carter's chilled fancy he and the Krooboy were as conspicuous as two actors strutting under lime light. But there were two things he overlooked, and these I believe must have been the salvation of the pair of them. The thick night mists were steaming out of the forest, and from the surf the thick white sea smoke drove in on the land breeze to meet them. This translucent fog, though it might not be very apparent to the eyes of the walkers themselves, would be quite enough to screen them from the gaze of hostile pickets who, after the manner of Africans, were already half scared out of their dusky skins by the fear of ghosts.

They had made the journey out to Smooth River in five and a quarter hours; they completed the journey back to Malla-Nulla in four, which meant good travelling; and because a heavy march like this may not be undertaken without physical payment in the stewy climate of the Coast, Carter felt certain premonitory symptoms which told him

that a good thumping dose of fever would be his when once he slackened his efforts and gave it a chance to take charge. But he was not much alarmed at the circumstance. As he told himself coolly enough, either by the time the fever came on he would have rejoined Mr. Smith at Malla-Nulla, who in that case was perfectly capable of looking after him, or he would have rejoined Mr. Smith in the Shades Beyond, and a fever owing to his body left behind on earth would not matter. As it happened neither of these alternatives had to be bargained with.

Malla-Nulla factory was eaves deep in white wet mist when they got to it, and found it earthy-smelling and empty. It was unmarked by fire, unsmirched by signs of battle, and, strangest of all, unlooted.

The pair of them charged up the veranda steps, Carter in the lead, with the twelve-bore held ready for an instant discharge. The Krooboy with matchet uplifted and teeth at the snarl looked the very picture of savage desperation and ferocity. They stepped into the empty mess-room and lit matches and a lamp. The land breeze sang through the bamboo walls, and Carter's home-made punkah swished overhead to the unseen impulse of the water wheel; but of quick human life, there was not a trace.

He had fitted up bells about the place, or rather strings that actuated wooden clappers which could beat on wooden drums. He set these all a-clang and listened. The place reeked of its usual mildew, and the smell nauseated him. They had got rid of the mildew scent at the Smooth River factory. But there was not a murmur of reply to his clamor.

White-Man's-Trouble delivered himself of wisdom. "Oh, Carter, I think dem Smith, an' all dem boys at factory lib for die. Dis place lib for full of ghosts. I fit for run back for Smooth River."

"Run away, then," said Carter, who was beginning to examine the mess-room systematically.

The Krooboy cowered in a chair and covered his eyes. "Oh, Carter, I no fit for march back alone. Dem ghosts plenty-too-much fond o' Kroo chop. Oh, Carter, you no be dam fool an' stay here. You lib back for Smooth River all-e-same me."

"My pagan friend, don't get too familiar. The next time I hear you calling me names, I shall break my knuckles up against one of the places where the worsted's been shaved off your skull. Observe"—said Carter, and poured some whiskey onto the table top and set light to it—"Observe those blue flames that crawl and nicker about, but do not burn the wood. In those the ghosts that have been threatening you are now being most painfully consumed. Do you believe it?"

"I fit for see 'em die," said White-Man's-Trouble devoutly. "Oh, Carter, you plenty-much-fine witch doctor. I fit for pipe-clay dem shoes, three pair a day. Oh, Carter, if Okky men lib for come, you burn them, too?"

"Certainly," said Carter, "anything to soothe your nerves. Though, as a matter of fact, I should demonstrate to them with a shotgun, not by burning methyated. Now, just nose around, boy, and help me to find out where Mr. Smith's evaporated to. They can't have eaten him, or some of them must have stayed behind to digest the meal; and they can't have kidnapped him, or he'd have broken up the happy home before he condescended to go, and as we see it now, it's no more squalid than usual. So now, Trouble, produce Mr. Smith."

"Smith? Oh, Carter, dem Smith lib for surf boat."

"How on earth do you know that?"

"Dem surf boat no lib for beach. Dem paddles no lib for veranda. Okky man no fit for boat boy. So Malla-

Nulla Krooboy, dey boat boy for dem Smith in Malla-Nulla surf boat. Savvy?"

"I do clearly. But why the deuce didn't you tell me all this before?"

"Because," said the Krooboy simply, "I too plenty-much frightened o' dem ghosts before you burn 'em."

"I wonder," said Carter thoughtfully, "if I shall ever understand all the workings of the African mind." He went onto the veranda and peered out into the mists. A fleecy blanket covered the sea and blotted out the water, and all things of low elevation that floated thereon. In the distance, between him and the moon, the two black mastheads of an invisible steamer ploughed through the whiteness, but between him and it a whole fleet of canoes and surf boats might have been snugly tucked away from his sight.

Then a sudden pang of coldness came upon him, which made him button up his white drill coat, and step back into the mess-room and huddle into a chair.

"Fever lib," said White-Man's-Trouble looking at him critically.

"I'm in for my usual two days' touch," said Carter, with the listlessness of the malaria already creeping over him.

"You fit for quinine-palaver?"

"I suppose so."

The Krooboy fetched the quinine bottle from Mr. Smith's well-filled medicine shelf.

"I'd some pills of my own somewhere."

"Steamah pills. Dem Cappy Image pills no dam good. I eat dem box myself."

"You thieving scoundrel!"

"Oh, Carter, I tell you dem pills no good." He laid a hand on his midriff. "No fit for give you even small-small twist there. Oh, Carter, I save you lose your temper over dem pills when I eat 'em mine self."

"I wish they'd been calomel. You'll get poisoned one of these days, Trouble, if you don't stop stealing. I've some corrosive sublimate tabloids for skin preserving stowed away somewhere, and if you bolt one of those, you lib for die one-time. Here, give me a dose of quinine."

The Krooboy found a cigarette paper, tapped it full of the feathery white powder, and rolled it up. Carter put it on his tongue and swilled it down with whiskey and water. "Quick, now, get me some blankets," he chattered. "I shall burst if I don't sweat directly."

White-Man's-Trouble packed him with rugs and coats, till in the baking atmosphere of the mess-room one wondered that any skin could resist the invitation.

But presently the wraps were flung aside, and Carter sat aching and burning in his clammy drill clothes, with his skin bone-dry, and a feel in his head as though it were moving in and out like a concertina.

"That last's the quinine," he told himself; and then, "I say, Trouble, you'd better think for your own neck now. I shall be otherwise occupied for the next thirty hours. You'll be well advised if you went away back to Smooth River. If the Okky men come here and knock me on the head, I really don't care. And if they'll only chop my unwholesome carcass, and get indigestion from it afterwards, I feel I shall get a grim enjoyment from watching their writhings from my own comfortable (or maybe uncomfortable) seat on the Other Side."

"You lib for bad fever," said White-Man's-Trouble thoughtfully.

Carter clutched at the Krooboy's brawny hand and wrung it enthusiastically. "Hullo, Pater! Fancy seeing you out here in this filthy hole! Well, sir, it is real good of you to leave Wharfedale and come all this way to look me up. How's the Mater? All right, eh? And did she do you in

the eye this year over the roses, or did you manage to snip off the buds ahead of her? You didn't happen to bring any beer with you, did you, sir? Nice cool draught of Pateley ale, in your big silver tankard that you won for stewing Hindoo babies alive at the burning ghats? We've got muggers here, too. . . . Lord, what rot I'm talking, and you aren't the Pater at all, but only a dashed good sort of an ugly nigger with a blue frying pan tattooed across the bridge of your nose. White-Man's-Trouble, tell me solemnly and truly. Why do noses have bridges? Why, for instance, not ferries? Wake up, you image, and give me a civil answer."

"You lib for dam bad fever," said White-Man's-Trouble still more thoughtfully, "an' if you lib for die, Okky men catch me one-time. So I fit for make you well one-time. Oh, Carter, you hear, I plenty-much fine doctor."

"You a doctor! With peacock's feathers growing out behind your ears instead of whiskers!"

"I savvy nothing white-man's drug-palaver. But I savvy plenty cure fever Krooboy fashion."

"Do you? Which of you? What rot I'm talking! But upon my Sam, the Pater's gone, and there are three distinct White-Man's-Troubles standing there all in a row. I'll just talk to the middle one, and you others shut up. Now, then, sir, you say you savvy Krooboy doctor-palaver?"

"Savvy plenty."

"Then, doc, I offer myself as a patient. Never mind sending in to Grasington for your amputating tools. Remember you are a Dales doctor, and as you've pointed out with offensive cheerfulness many times, you saw me into this hot and wicked world, and I know you jolly well hope to see me out. You catch the patient and we do the rest, as the undertakers say when they send round their cards about top hats and gun cases. Special quotations for fever

patients F. O. B., for then a couple of firebars out of the engine room does the trick, and saves the cost of an elaborate coffin."

"Oh, Carter, listen to me."

"Well?"

"I lib for Krooboy quarters for fetich ju-ju. You sit here. No run away. Savvy?"

"Be long gone?"

"I come back one-time."

"All right. Give my compliments to Miss Slade, and say we had a jolly walk in the moonlight and found everything all right when we got here, except that Mr. Swizzle-Stick—whose other name I forget—had eloped with the assistant typewriter. Say, it was rather a nuisance about the typewriter woman, because she was the one who made the jellies, jolly cool yellow jellies with just a drop of sherry in them that were perfectly ripping when you had been sick. My mother used to make jellies like that herself for us kids when we were sick——"

He was still rambling on when the Krooboy returned, and by that time the fever was burning dangerously high. It was not running its normal course. He had undergone abnormal exertion, and the resulting fever was correspondingly fierce.

White-Man's-Trouble came in out of the warm moist night outside, with some liquid in a cracked teacup. The patient refused to know him, and so the Krooboy picked him up in his enormous arms and got the liquid down his throat by drenching him as a nurse might drench a fractious child.

Carter coughed and spat, but the dose was down, and in three minutes it had started its work. In five minutes it had laid him out, and then White-Man's-Trouble carried him into the next room and laid him on a bed. Then

from a bag he produced materials and did with them what will not be set down here. . . . And after that he groped around inside the mosquito bar, killed what insects were lodged there, pulled down the netting, and tucked it accurately round the mattress.

Then he took up his matchet again, spat in his great right hand to get a good grip on the hilt, lay down on the mat before the door and went to sleep.

The room pinged with mosquitoes; a leopard roared persistently from the bush at the back of the factory, and a rat somewhere up in the rafters gnawed at a sounding piece of board with irritating persistence. Moreover, of course there was the probability of the Okky men coming to the factory at any moment for that much talked-of massacre. But none of these things disturbed White-Man's-Trouble. He suddenly wished for sleep, and therefore to sleep he promptly resigned himself. All thoughts of anything beyond that immediate desire were blotted out from his simple brain. The patient might awake, and rave, or want assistance; but that did not matter. Nothing mattered beyond his wish there and then for sleep.

The beautiful unreliability of his tribe was strongly present in White-Man's-Trouble.

CHAPTER V

EVENTS AT MALLA-NULLA

MR. SMITH had been away from his creature comforts for a spell of twenty hours, and most of that time had been spent on the thwart of a dancing surf boat in the embraces of a dank sea fog. He had been divorced from food, stimulant and tobacco smoke for all that time—the surf boat had been twice upset in getting off, and drowned all the matches—and as a consequence his temper was vile, and his language was sulphurous. He was barely thankful when he came back to the beach again and found Malla-Nulla factory neither burned nor looted; he was openly ungrateful when he found that the last of the stock of limes had gone mouldy, and realized for the moment a Coast cocktail was beyond the limitations of art. As a consequence Mr. Smith romped up and down the untidy mess-room in a state bordering on frenzy, and in his own especial polyglot reviled the unknown K. O'Neill as the *fons et origo mali*.

In addition to the legitimate boat boys, the whole of the other factory boys had been crammed into the surf boat, and as a consequence they also were chilled, cramped, and bad-tempered. His own body servant was openly insolent when commanded to produce dry tobacco and a pipe. And when on the top of all this Mr. Smith opened Carter's bedroom door, stumbled over the sleepy White-Man's-Trouble, and was promptly floored by that nervous savage and threatened with a well-filed matchet, the remaining rags of his

temper at last gave way. He sat there on the floor, a very unkempt figure, and for five minutes without stopping (or repeating himself) said exactly what he thought.

During four of these minutes his Assistant had been awake, and listening to him through the thin filter of the mosquito bar.

"Perhaps I should explain, sir," said Carter, stiffly, when the flow of words at last ended, "that I came back here because I thought you were in a hole and I might be of use. I have not been indulging in whiskey as you suggest, but I believe I have been through a stiffish bout of fever."

"Get up, man, and look at yourself in the glass."

Carter did that, inspected a moment, and then whistled. "Good Lord," he said, "I don't wonder you think I had been on the razzle. What on earth's this white stuff painted round my eyesockets? I look like a clown in a circus."

"Oh, Carter," said White-Man's-Trouble, "dem ju-ju. Last night you lib for fever plenty-too-much bad. I fit for cure you. Now you well. If you touch dem ju-ju, you lib for fever again, one-time."

Carter's meddling hand dropped to his side as though the white stuff round his eye had stung him. He turned half-apologetically to Mr. Smith. "Do you think that's likely, sir? You know West African ways better than I do."

"Beyond me. But you never can tell, and there's always the probability of Africa springing something new upon one. If I were you I should let your personal appearance slide and risk wearing that decoration for the day, if your boy says so. Ju-ju's a dangerous thing to meddle with anyway, and he calls it that. Besides your fever's gone, you say?"

"Absolutely. And I don't even feel a wreck."

"You're sure you were pretty bad last night?"

"I fancy I was close upon pegging out. I never had such a stiff bout before."

"Well, Mr. Carter," said the old man screwing in an eyeglass and staring at him, "if I were you I should dash Trouble five bob for saving your life, and follow out the rest of his instructions. Ju-ju often gets there when drugs won't touch the spot at all, and, mark you, you're getting that admission from the man who knows more about drugs suitable for Coast ailments than anybody in West Africa. The only trouble about putting this into general practice, is, where are you going to find the proper ju-ju to meet the case? But you seem to have got hold of the right boy for this sort of thing in Trouble. Turning to business for a moment, I hope you're satisfied with your exertions on behalf of Craven and O'Neill with his Majesty of Okky?"

"Well, I don't know what he's done yet, sir. Mr. Slade said he had wiped out Malla-Nulla factory and killed you and all the boys, but that seems, well, exaggerated."

"Slade always takes the gloomy view. The King talked; and I'll admit things looked ugly for a bit. You see you'd walked off with the Firm's artillery."

"Good heavens, do you mean that my tin-pot ten-and-sixpenny revolver was the only gun about the place?"

"Certainly I do. You see—er—Mr. Carter, one occasionally—er—dines rather heavily here, and once after dining too well I saw a man shoot another whose loss he regretted afterwards. So as I wished to spare myself those regrets, I saw to it that there was nothing more deadly about the place than trade guns, and you wouldn't catch me loosing off one of those, however drunk I might be. I regret to say the King didn't continue to carry his liquor like a gentleman after you'd left; he grew quarrelsome; and finally I had to pull him up with some sharpness.

Then came the ultimatum. He said I should find the roads stopped already—the old scoundrel had been playing me like a trout, it seems, till everything had been got ready, and he told me that as a fine for your *lèse-majesté* he should help himself to the contents of the factory as they stood.”

“But you headed him off there, sir, at any rate.”

Swizzle-Stick Smith chuckled. “Well, I haven’t been on this Coast for twenty-five years without knowing a thing or two. I told the King I was rather glad to hear him say that because it showed that a prophecy made a year ago was now going to be fulfilled. He asked what it was. I spouted to him

‘Maecenas Atavis edite regibus
O et præsidium et dulce decus¹ meum,
Sunt, quos curriculo pulverem Olympicum
Conlegisse juvat, . . .’

as the first thing that came into my head, and fine pompous lines they are, as you’d remember if you’d ever been to a public school, which you haven’t.”

“I’ve written out all Horace twenty times over in impositions and know the bulk by heart, but I can’t say I ever got a taste for construing it.”

“Well, we won’t argue out the value of a classical education just now. Anyway the King of Okky was impressed. Of course he twigged the stuff was not English, or Okky, or Kroo, or Arabic, or any of the tongues hereabouts. He asked what it was. I said it was a priest’s tongue. He asked what the words meant. I romanced then and told him they prophesied that the factory would be looted by a King who had made himself a King—the old scoundrel was born a slave, you’ll remember, and made the throne

vacant by killing his predecessor—and that two days afterwards a new and very curious sort of ju-ju would be put on that King, who would thereupon die a new and very painful sort of death.”

“Ripping!” said Carter.

“The meeting broke up in confusion just about then, because his soldiers down below began to run amuck among our boys, and the King heard the row and went for me. However, I’d my big lead tobacco box handy, and I wiped him over the head with that, and as the boys below were frightened, and had got our surf boat ready for launching, I saw that they intended to quit, whatever I might say, and I didn’t see the force of holding the fort here alone. So I went to sea with them, and spent the evening preaching them a long sermon on the vice of cowardice. I hadn’t much faith that the King would be fool enough to swallow my prophecy, but as I say, you can never be sure which way the African brain will twist. And here you see’s the factory untouched.”

“When Mr. K. gets a report on this, sir, I fancy you’ll have a letter you will like.”

“Maybe. But I shan’t wear myself out expecting it. Look here”—Mr. Smith produced a letter from the breast pocket of his stained pyjamas—“came in just after you’d left. Sent by canoe and special runner from our factory on the Monk River. Agent there says he wants to charge me seven pound ten for forwarding my mail. If that’s K. O’Neill’s idea of running a business economically, I wish he’d come out to the Coast here and find a way of making profits to correspond.”

Carter had a shrewd suspicion that if Mr. K. had ordered an expenditure of seven pounds ten shilling sterling over the forwarding of a letter, it contained an idea which that very astute business man was sure would produce at

least seventy pounds in the near future. But he did not irritate his superior by mentioning this aloud. Instead he asked, "Any instructions for me, sir?"

"Well, yes. First of all there is a direct one. K. says, 'As Mr. Carter seems a good hand at collecting native curios, I should be glad if he would get me some ivory war horns. I want a row of them on my drawing-room wall.' So, young man, you had better get hold of some escribellos and your carving tools and set to work."

"I don't propose," said Carter shortly, "to start faking curios for Mr. K. A man like that would spot them at once. But I'll send my model horn, and see to it he has some other good specimens of the real thing."

"As you like. Well, the letter goes on to advise us that the next thing America and France and Great Britain are going to gamble over is rubber. Not collected wild rubber, you understand, but rubber estates where the vines can be planted and cultivated. K.'s evidently going in for Company Promoting, and as a preliminary he instructs me to get options of suitable territory. He's got an idea that an uncleared estate on the Coast here, which could grow rubber if it had the chance, can be bought at the rate of a case of gin per thousand acres; and if you've a fancy for untouched bush, and a doubtful title, I daresay that is so."

"But one can get a clear title, I suppose, if one takes the trouble?"

Mr. Smith's pipe finally refused even to bubble, so he started to clean out its more obvious horrors into Carter's wash basin. He went on between the throes of this nice operation—"Depends who you mean by 'one.' If you're hinting at yourself, I have no doubt you could manage it, because—you're a very painstaking young man, and I'm sure—you see yourself as a partner of K. O'Neill already. Isn't that so?"

"That might do when I'm ready, sir," said Carter laughing, "unless I see something better in the meantime. But as a point of fact I wasn't setting up myself as a man to see through the tangle of African land transfer."

"If you were referring to me, I shouldn't recommend you to bet on the result, unless the odds are big on your side. And mark you I've been dabbling in West African real estate at intervals for five-and-twenty years"—he pointed to the crown of his bald head—"that's what's worn my hair so thin in places. You get your eye on a piece of land here, you get all the local evidence you can rake up as to who is owner, and you pay that man and put up your buildings. If within the next six months more than three other owners don't turn up with absolutely flawless-looking titles, you'll be lucky. It's a case of pay each of them in turn, or clear out."

"But surely there's the alternative of doing neither?"

"Certainly, if you can get the Government to back you up, and that's the rarest thing imaginable. You see any land trouble of that kind, whatever the rights or wrongs of it may be, always means a war when the white man refuses either to pay or quit. The local kings and ju-ju men always snap at the chance. Well, we needn't argue this out any further. I know all the districts in at the back here where rubber can be grown, and I shall go off on a trip up country and see what I can do in the way of negotiations. I leave you in charge here at Malla-Nulla. Your particular object in life will have to be keeping down expenses."

"You think there will be no trade then?"

"Not now the King of Okky has closed the roads," said Smith decisively.

Now Swizzle-Stick Smith had a long list of failings, but letting his assistants eat the bread of idleness was not

among them. "Nothing like work—and a moderate amount of drugs—for keeping fever and mischief out of a man," was his motto, and he saw to it that Carter remained steadily on the run. But now the roads were stopped, and it was only the rare merchant who straggled in scared, and often wounded, from that mysterious Africa behind, George Carter discovered that life was a very different thing. Beforetime, he had found work in the feteesh, and round the factory generally, a trial to the flesh; but the idleness that took its place was infinitely more objectionable.

He employed the Krooboy staff in whitewashing, in building, in making a caricature of a garden; he made the native clerks polish up their books into a shape that would have satisfied even a Glasgow Chartered Accountant; and for himself he made Okky arrows, axes, spears, drums and warhorns, in such quantities that even the curiosity shops of Europe would have been glutted if they had all gone home.

In despair he even thawed to a certain intimacy with the Portuguese linguister, but presently cast him off in disgust, and realized why on the West Coast one divides up the population into white men, black men, and Portuguese. Of course White-Man's-Trouble was always at his elbow, but he hardly fulfilled the requirements of a companion.

To be precise, after the roads were stopped, and Mr. Smith had departed elsewhere, the Trader-in-charge of Malla-Nulla factory discovered for himself what many millions of men have found out before, that it is not good for man to live alone, and though he made many ingenious plans for remedying the evil, all of these, save one, invariably broke down on being tested. The one plan that was sound related to Laura Slade.

Every time that Laura's name inserted itself into the argument his mind would presently leap back to Upper Wharfedale, and he would hear afresh that warning of his father's about taking a wife of one's own color. And his father, he reminded himself, had once held an Indian chaplaincy, and knew what he was talking about.

But by degrees, as this proposition was argued out again and again, and the loneliness of West Africa in general, and Malla-Nulla in particular bit deeper and deeper home, so did England and all that dwelt therein drift further and further away. He had found occasion the day after he had been left in sole charge of the factory to send a business note to Slade at Smooth River. In it he enclosed another to Laura, and to this latter he received a reply that he found charming. The affairs of the factories required many messages after that; and presently the pair of them did away with the cloak and pretence of commerce altogether, and White-Man's-Trouble was kept trotting backwards and forwards across the glaring beaches, frankly as Cupid's messenger. Only once did Slade interfere, and that was when the Krooboy, presuming on his peculiar position, stole from the Smooth River factory some article of more than customary value. Slade said nothing publicly, but took the law into his own hands, and after the custom of the Coast banged White-Man's-Trouble lustily with a section of a packing case; and even then Carter would have known nothing about the matter had not there been a nail in the weapon of offence, which left its marks, and about which he made inquiries.

Slade it seemed had also received from K. O'Neill similar instructions to those recorded above, on the matter of rubber estates, and with his usual indecision would determine one day to set off personally into the bush, and the next day to do the necessary bargaining by correspondence.

Finally he wrote to Carter a querulous letter saying that as he got no help from anybody in deciding on such an important subject, he was just going to stay on at Smooth River and twiddle his thumbs, and so Carter was not in the least surprised to hear from Laura within the next twenty hours that her father with hammock-train and escort had that day set off for a prolonged expedition into the bush.

"His last instructions," wrote Laura, "were that I was not to be in the least nervous; he was going to avoid the Okky country; and anyway he was an old Coaster, and knew most thoroughly how to take care of himself. And so, nervous I refuse to feel. But, oh! I am so lonely here with no one whiter than Mr. and Mrs. da Silva to talk to. I somehow quite share your instinctive dislike to West Coast Portuguese."

Within ten minutes after reading that letter, Carter was out under a brazen glare of heat, marching along the sand where it was wet and hard, and nearing the straggle of palms which marked the banks of Smooth River, at the rate of four good miles to the hour. When a white man walks at that speed through West Africa mid-day heat, it is only because some question of life or death hangs upon the speed; though in this case Carter told himself that love was the same as life. He pinned his eyes on the Smooth River palms, which the refraction made to dance up and down most coquettishly, and repeated this over and over again, because another voice within him persisted in sneering something about two very lonely people with nothing to do, who were not in love at all, but merely bored with idleness and their own society; and finally he got quite angry over the matter. He stuck out his great dogged chin, and presently cursed aloud. He shook his fist at the splendor of the tropical sun. "I do love the girl," he

declared, "and I will marry her in spite of my father, and K., and everyone, if she will have me. Curse it! Why should I hesitate when I love her? This infernal climate is making me as slack and undecided as even poor old Slade."

So with the surf booming ceaselessly in his ears, and the sea-smoke driving over him and making his white drill collar damp and sticky, he marched resolutely on to meet Fate.

CHAPTER VI

THE COMING OF THE OKKY-MEN

THE attack on Smooth River factory did not take place without due warning. It seemed that a large caravan of native merchants from the hinterland had come through the Okky country with a fine cargo of produce since the King had stopped the roads. Whether they had cut new roads through the bush for themselves, or fought their way past the obstructing ju-ju, they did not explain; they arrived at the factory with kernels, a few tusks of discolored ivory, a few quills of water-worn gold, and a fine parcel of high-grade rubber, which were duly valued; they took cloth, six flint-lock guns, a case or two of gin, and the balance in pink Kola-nuts by way of payment; and with these on the skulls of their carriers, they marched away along the Beach and out of this history.

Then presently there came down envoys from the King of Okky demanding with a fine inconsistency that O'Neill and Craven's factory should pay his Majesty the transit blackmail which he had been unable to collect himself. Carter was sent for, post-haste, from Malla-Nulla, and was at first minded to tell those envoys to go to a kingdom which repute says is even hotter than West Africa. But thoughts of Laura living there by herself, and a dread of the horrors of native war made him offer a compromise. "Open the roads," said he, "and we'll pay up these fellows' dues, though your King knows perfectly well he hasn't an atom of claim on this factory. It's the custom for traders

the white man's doctor's tools as shall forever spoil its beauty. So that when the Prophet takes you up into Paradise, even the least of the houris will shrink from you and hide her eyes from all sight of you in the folds of her green robe. Just you stick that in your memory, Mr. Kwaka, and don't come boasting 'round here. Observe, I am a man of my hands: I can make white iron burn."

He pulled a length of magnesium wire from his pocket and lit it with a match. The big Haûsa stared owlshly at the fierce white flame.

"That is the glare of Gehenna," said Carter, "into which if you come to Smooth River again you will presently descend, after being cast out from Paradise because of the reason I mentioned. You have now my permission to depart. And I wonder," he added to himself, "if my Mohammedan theology is fairly correct. Kwaka's swallowed it right enough, but if he hands it along to a mullah, he may find a flaw, and we shall have the whole brood of them down about our ears in half no-time."

However the portent was sufficiently startling for the moment. Kwaka argued that a man who could make iron burn could doubtless (as he claimed) spoil the good looks of a True Believer by some other of his infernal arts, and therefore was a person whom it would be healthy to let alone. So he and his escort took themselves off into the forest as unobtrusively as might be.

But with Laura, Carter took another tone. "Look here, my dear," he said, "you simply must run across to the Canaries till things have simmered down again here. I don't want to alarm you, but it's quite on the cards that infernal old Mormon of a King may take it into his woolly head to be dangerous. You've had one taste of his quality already."

"Two," said the girl, and shuddered, "and he's sent my

father presents and messages since. But I can't go away from Smooth River, at any rate till my father comes back. He left me in charge, you see."

"Which I think very improper of him. I don't believe in girls being mixed up in business matters, at any rate in West Africa, and I am sure K. O'Neill would be frightfully down on it—what are you laughing at? Laura, tell me one-time what you are sniggering about in that ridiculous way. Oh, I see. You think I have never seen Mr. K. and am talking through my hat. Well, my dear, if you had read fifty times over every letter that K. has written to Malla-Nulla factory during the last eighteen months, you would know that man and his likes and his dislikes, and his ambitions, and his cranks just about as accurately as I do. Anyway, I repeat, he'd hate to have you here in charge."

"Just remember that I don't agree with you one bit, Mr. Carter."

"Very well, Miss Slade, you can jolly well do the other thing. But take charge here I shall, and go to the Islands you must. There's a B. and A. boat due to call at Monk River the day but one after to-morrow. I'll send for our surf boat, and we'll take you there in style. Won't you have a ripping time of it at Las Palmas and up in the Monte! I wonder what the new hotel's like up there. And I say, Laura, go down to that farm at the bottom of the Caldera, and I bet you a new hat it takes you half an hour longer than my record time to get up again as far as Atalaya—Hullo, what's the matter now?"

"You are making things rather hard for me. I'd go away from this hateful Coast if I could, but we simply can't afford it, and there you have the bare fact."

"But I thought——"

"Oh, yes, of course you did, that father was a sort of

local millionaire. Well, he isn't. He did once have private means, but that I think was before I was born, and only the reputation of them remains now. He's made big commissions on the factory's trading, I know, but he's invested badly, and I think he's been robbed. Probably, too, I've been extravagant."

"Rubbish."

"Well, anyway, the money's gone, and the brutal truth is I haven't a sovereign in the world."

"Good Lord! You ought not to have been left here like that. It was beastly careless of Slade."

"He never thought of it. And if he had, he couldn't have done anything. His equipment of course came from about the factory, but as regards money, he went away without a pound in his pocket. There aren't shops that one can spend money in to be found up in the bush."

"It's disgustingly awkward," said Carter frowning. "Of course every penny that I have in the world would be as much yours as it ever had been mine, but the fact is, my dear, I've paid it all away as it came. You see, in a way I was a sort of bad egg before I got a billet out here on the Coast, where, I suppose, if you come to look at it, there are small opportunities of roystering. Besides, with Mr. Smith always before one as an example of what not to be, it doesn't take very much resolution to keep straight. Anyway, in ancient days I ran up all the debts I could get tick for, and I landed in the poor old Pater for a lot more than a younger son's share. Well, what with selling curios through that old blackguard Balgarnie on the *M'poso* (who I know robs me of half the proceeds), and commission on our turnover at Malla-Nulla, which has increased a lot since I've been there (till of course this row cropped up), and my small bit of regular screw, altogether I've made a very decent income, and I've taken a bit of pride in pay-

ing off the old debts with ten per cent. of interest added. I knew that extra ten per cent. would tickle some of them frightfully. It was just that chunk of interest that cleaned me out down to the bone, and I chucked it in because I thought one could not possibly want hard cash down on the Coast here. What idiots men are to let themselves run short of money! However, I shall have another quarter's screw due in a couple of months' time and in the meanwhile you must go to the Islands on tick."

"You're a dear good boy, but it can't be done. I shall stay on here and make the best of things."

"You will do nothing of the kind, young woman. You will travel on a Madeira chair in a palatial surf boat as far as Monk River as we just now arranged, and then I shall walk on board the B. and A. boat with you, and explain to the purser who you are, and everything will be as right as ninepence."

She looked at him with full eyes. "You make things difficult for me."

"Not a bit of it. I'm the man that's going to shoulder the difficulties."

"Oh, you didn't know it. But if you asked a favor for my father's daughter from the purser of the *Secondee*—she's the boat that's due—you would get an unkind answer. We're in debt all round, and I'm afraid he didn't behave very well to either the purser or the captain of the *Secondee*. Now, please do not press me any more. I stay here at Smooth River factory."

George Carter hit the table with his fist. "Then I stay, too. The da Silvas will put me up, and if they object, I'll turn them out into the bush and live in their house alone. Malla-Nulla must look after itself."

"What will Mr. K. say to that?"

"He will approve. K.'s a tough nut in business matters, but he's a man all through."

"Is he?" said the girl with a queer smile. "I don't agree with you."

"One may not at the moment like the way he hustles one along in his letters," said Carter stoutly, "but he's a man all through, and if he was to get to know how things are fixed here, and to hear I'd stuck to my own job at Malla-Nulla and left you in the lurch at Smooth River, he'd fire me one-time, even if he had to get a steamer specially stopped to land his mail. No, K. O'Neill would have no use for brutes of that description in his employ. Now, if you'll be so very nice, my dear, as to pick up that swizzle-stick and make me a good grippy cocktail, when I've had that I'll go out and do what I can to discourage the Okky men if they see fit to pay a call."

Now, his Majesty the King of Okky once boasted to a West African official that he could put 20,000 spearmen into the field, but there is no doubt that this was an overestimate. Moreover many of the Okky troops carried flint-lock guns and matchets in place of the spear, and others again were bowmen, and still others wielded the Dahomey axe. But his Majesty was a parvenu king who had fought his way to the throne, and he saw to it that there was no inefficiency in his War Office. He made the conditions of service sufficiently pleasant to tempt in the fighting Moslem from the Haûsa country, and these fine soldiers of fortune gave the needful stiffening to his own pagan levies.

Then, also, the King of Okky made full use of the great cult of Ju-ju. The average West African king is completely under the thumb of the ju-ju men, and if he is not actually their nominee and puppet, he knows that if he runs at all counter to their wishes and policy, he will die some frantic death devised by the cleverest poisoners on earth. But King Kallee the First was not only King of

Okky but he was also Head Ju-ju man of that mysterious state, or as it is sometimes written, Head Witch-doctor. He could, when he chose, hale a subject from his dwelling and pin him to the Okky City crucifixion tree for no further reason than his kingly will. He could also cause a piece of fluttering rag, or a bunch of hen's feathers to be tied above a subject's lintel, and that subject and all his household would not dare to pass the charm; nor would anyone else dare to have communion with them; so that in the end they would die of hunger and thirst and become a pestilence to the community among whom they had lived; and no one thought of raising the breath of objection. The King had put ju-ju on one of his own subjects, and that was all.

Moreover the King, having set eyes on Laura Slade, wished to instal her in a wing of the great mud palace of Okky as his wife. So far, throughout life, when he had created a wish, fulfilment followed as a matter of course, be the means what they might. In his demands for Laura, Kallee was at times amazed at his own moderation. He had approached Slade (who to him was the girl's proprietor) just as one native gentleman might approach another, and inquired her price. Slade, who could not give a decisive answer even to such a preposterous matter as this, temporized after his usual custom. The King naturally saw in this a scheme to enhance the girl's price and displayed royal munificence. He would pay Slade a thousand puncheons of palm oil and a thousand bags of rubber, and two thousand bags of kernels; and when Slade waived this aside and spoke of his daughter's reluctance for matrimony, Kallee spoke of the splendor in which his chief queen would live. Slaves in all abundance, cloth as fine as silk, ornaments of gold, and an American alarm clock should be hers; her food should be coos-cousoo of the finest, her drink should

"Don't be melodramatic. Now run into the mess-room, there's a good girl, and get down those two Winchesters, and load up the magazines. I'm going down to help the boys."

But even as he spoke there came a sudden hard puff of the land breeze that made the mist swirl and twist up into ghostly life, and left canals and pools of clearness. He darted inside, snatched up one of the rifles, and crammed it full of cartridges. "I wish I'd a scatter-gun," he said. "I used to be a nailer at rabbits and the occasional grouse at home. However, it won't do to miss here, although the tool is new." He threw up the weapon to his shoulder, and shot as a game shot shoots, with head erect and both eyes staring wide at a leather charm-case on the broad black chest which he picked as his object. He did not know how to squint along the barrel. Then he pressed home the trigger, and had the thrill of knowing that he had shot his first man. . . . He warmed to the work after that, and fired on and on with deadly speed and accuracy, till the heated barrels of the repeaters burned Laura Slade's hands as she charged the magazines beneath them. From somewhere in the lower part of the factory came White-Man's-Trouble, and when in answer to the fusillade, showers of pot-leg began to rustle over the veranda and scream through the roof, that valiant person presently dragged out bedding to form a breastwork. But although Carter kicked him till his foot ached the Krooboy would not show his own head over it sufficiently to use a gun for the mutual defence. He stuck to it stolidly that he was a "plenty-too-much bad shot," and Carter was too much occupied in keeping up his own fire to spare time for further coercion. But as he changed rifles with Laura, he said every poisonous thing to White-Man's-Trouble that his mind could invent, and that African listened, but made neither answer nor reply.



He fired on and on with deadly speed and accuracy, till the heated barrels of the repeaters burned Laura Slade's hands.
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The fight was going badly against the factory force. The Okky men's original surprise had been very complete, and they had rushed the outer line of the defences all round. The inner line consisted merely of the buildings; and the factory boys had bolted for these, and had joined the mulatto clerks and the Portuguese who were there already. The whole defence, of course, was badly managed; but then it must be remembered that it was devised by traders, not by soldiers. If it had not been for Carter's education on the moors and warrens of Upper Wharfedale, and his consequent deadliness with a rifle against rushes at close quarters, the factory would have been put to the storm within five minutes of the first attack.

Besides, with a few exceptions, the factory boys were Kroos; and these, though they are magnificent workers and about as amphibious as seals, are emphatically not fighting men. They battled manfully enough after the shock of the first surprise, and because no path of escape offered itself; and whilst there were trade guns to fire, they derived a fine encouragement from the noise of the black trade-powder explosions, and the acrid smell of smoke. But few of them made any attempt to reload their flintlocks a second time, and for cold matchet work at close quarters they had little appetite. So by ones, and twos, and tens, they began slipping off into the bush (to be hunted down piecemeal by the savage enemy later on) and soon only the clerks and the two fever-shaken Portuguese were left alive in the lower buildings.

It was at this point a new engine was added to the attack. Dawn had just leaped up yellow and sickly over the sea, when a crash rang out that jarred the air and every building about the place.

"Hear that?" croaked Carter. "That's a cannon, and a brass one as you can tell by the ring. It's probably one

of those old brass guns that the Portuguese used to cast for the natives two hundred years ago. One of my curiosity dealers promised me fifty golden sovereigns for a genuine specimen. If I don't spot that gun and pick off the men who are serving it, they'll jug us for a certainty. But they've got the blessed thing so jolly well hidden among the bush! Well, I'm going to ease up on my own shooting and watch for the next flash. Get me a drink, you plucky darling, will you, or else my throat will crack in two. Bring a chattie of water; that's what I want. The heat of this night has been about the worst I have known on the Coast."

"It is too hot to last," said the girl. "I'm afraid even the water in the chattie will be as warm as tea."

She went into the mess-room, and presently came back on hands and knees to keep below the showers of pot-leg which were persistently whistling overhead, and gave him the wet porous bottle, and crouched beside him under the breastwork as he drank.

"Well, my sweetheart," said Carter, "if it isn't unlucky to drink one's best girl's health in water, here's your toast! You're the finest plucked lassie in all the wide and wondrous earth, and now I come to think of it, I don't believe I ever proposed to you."

"No, you never did. I don't see why you should."

"Stick your head lower down. That thing that said '*whisp-whisp!*' was a rifle-bullet. They've got a blooming marksman down there, and I can't have you picked off. And don't talk rubbish. You know you're jolly going to marry me as soon as ever we can afford it, if ever we get out of this, which isn't likely." He clapped an arm snugly round her, and *w-o-s-h* came a load of pot-leg into the other side of the bedding which protected them. "Got any silly objections to make to that?"

"Have you thought over what it means, George? You know I'm not white."

"Bosh! Anyway you're white enough for me. Let go the chattie. And as I said before, Here's luck. Ugh! African river water, half mud, half essence of nigger from higher up. Moreover, as you remarked, hot as tea. *Bang!* there goes that infernal cannon again, and I've been gossiping with you—proposing, I mean—and haven't seen the flash. Plunked a shot into one of the palm oil puncheons in the store below, by the sound of it. Hullo, here comes the wind. Now, somebody will have his hair combed."

As though the discharge of the ancient brass gun had been a signal, a tornado opened upon them without warning, and almost in its full strength in the first blast.

One minute there was a stagnant calm, with air so hot and stale that it hardly seemed to refresh one to breathe it. The next wind travelling often at a hundred miles an hour bellowed and roared at them in tearing spasms of fury. The factory building reeled and groaned at its impact. Sticks, boards, corrugated roofing and empty barrels solved the problem of aerial flight. The close-grown trees of the forest that hemmed the factory in on the landward side were flattened earthwards as though by the pressure of some unseen giant hand; yes, flattened down, and down, till one thought that any human beings that were beneath them must inevitably be crushed out of all living shape into the foul, soft swampy ground beneath. And in cold truth some of the Okky men who cowered there during the enforced lull of the attack did so die.

The firing had ceased automatically on both sides, and a bombardment of sticks, leaves, sand and stones pelted them all unmercifully. It was impossible to face the wind; indeed, so violent was the torrent of air, that the mere act of taking breath became a matter of the nicest art.

The girl lay crouched under the huddle of bedding, buffeted into semi-unconsciousness, with Carter's arm holding

her tight down to the floor boards of the veranda. He put his lips to her ear and bawled a message. She shook her head. Through the insane yell of the wind she could not hear a word. He laughed and kissed her, and then, taking away his protecting arm, worked his perilous way like some clinging, creeping thing into the inside of the dwelling.

Even this was filled with the wind. A door, smashed from its hinges, clattered noisily about in one corner, as though it had been some uncouth mechanical toy propelled by clumsy clockwork. Everything movable hopped on the floor, or danced from the walls. And of course to this disorder was added all the dishevelment which had been caused by the volleys of jagged cast iron fired through the flimsy walls by the Okky men's flintlocks. But Carter knew what he wanted, and sought for it with a single mind.

Presently from amongst the *débris* he emerged with a four-gallon drum; and then he worked his way to a cupboard where Slade kept his store of cigarettes. Luckily it was full. Slade had boarded a steamer lately where his credit in the forecastle shop was still untarnished, and his plausible tongue had procured him a whole two-dozen case of half-hundred tins on some ingenious deferred-payment scheme of his own. There were twenty-two of the green tins left, and Carter got them all out, opened them, and recklessly emptied their contents onto the floor. With infinite pains, and sheltering the liquid from the blast under his coat, he decanted the contents of the big drum into the tins till all were full. Then he re-lidded them, and jabbed a hole with his penknife in each lid.

He rebuilt them into their own wooden case as he primed them, and when this was full, dragged it out through the doorway into the casemate of mattresses. Laura and White-Man's-Trouble still crouched there helplessly, and the tornado still yelled and roared and boomed. It was carrying

water with it now, bitter salt from the sea, and whipping the face like hail where it impinged.

Carter was breathless and panting by the time he had managed once more to drag himself under the shelter of the bedding; but he was keenly alive to the needs of the immediate future. Already he noted a diminution in the tornado's fury; the hustling cloud of sticks, and leaves, and branches, which it carried along was growing less thick, and although this was by far the hardest hurricane he had ever seen, he knew from previous acquaintance with the breed that it might well drop to perfect calm as suddenly as it had arisen.

As a point of fact it deceived him. The wind lulled, and the forest trees swung upwards in unison as though they had been performing a trick. The air cleared, and Carter raised his head to try and spot the part of the bush where the brass gun was masked. A black man sprang from the undergrowth, lifted a gun, fired, and missed. Carter threw up the Winchester for a snapshot.

"Got him—Laura, for the Lord's sake keep down in shelter, or they'll pick you off to a certainty. Trouble, you hound, roll up those pillows and blankets underneath you into a hard wad, and stuff them into that gap at the corner there——"

"Isn't there a splendid chill after that awful heat?" the girl said. "Wrap up, George, or you'll have fever. Here's your coat."

"Look out," Carter shouted. "Hold on all with those blankets. Here comes more tornado."

Once more the wind slammed down upon them with insane fury, and once more all loose inanimate things rose into vigorous flight. The forest trees cowered down into the swamps from which they grew. Solid rods of rain split against the factory buildings, and sent deluges of water

squirting through the bamboo walls as though the match-wood backing had not been there. The roar was like the continuous passing of a hundred heavy trains over a hundred iron bridges all side by side.

Gone altogether now was the stagnant heat. The air was scoured clean, and it was forced into the lungs at such high pressure that it exhilarated one like some deliciously choice vintage of champagne.

"I'm hanged if I let those beggars kill us," Carter bawled out during one of the lulls. "In this splendid air life's too gorgeous." And then *bump* came the wind upon them again.

But the tornado had blown out the heart of its strength. In five more minutes the wind had dropped, the rain ceased, the air cleared, the sun glared out overhead and began to heat the tropical day, and white steam oozed up from all the face of creation.

This time Carter's rifle represented the whole orchestra of death for the defence. The factory Krooboy's flintlocks spoke no more; the ill-aimed Winchesters of the snuff-and-butter colored da Silva and his wife were silent. The Portuguese and the factory clerks, and the factory porters had cannily crawled away into the bush. They knew nothing of what was ahead of them in those steamy shades. One certainty alone fluttered big in their minds, and that was that they were leaving massacre behind.

CHAPTER VII

THE INVISIBLE FIRE

IN the factories which dot the West African seaboard and rivers, death is such a constant visitor that much of his grimness had faded. At home, in England, or America, or Hamburg, we shiver with apprehension whenever our relative who is "out on the West Coast" comes up into the mind; but the relative himself takes his doses of fever when they fall due with a certain callous philosophy, and on his emergence shattered and shrunk from the attack, congratulates himself on not being a candidate for a gun-case and a top hat that time. Those who go up in the bush and are there engulfed, those who get drowned in the ever-grinding surf, those who go out by the thousand and one opportunities which the climate and the surroundings offer, slip off their human garb with an easy nonchalance; and those who are left pronounce some pithy epitaph over the deceased, and go on with their quicker interests.

With the native African, death is an event of even smaller moment still; and in the event of a quarrel, one competitor will often sit down, cuddle his knees, shut his eyes, and there and then deliberately suspend his vital processes, merely to cause temporary annoyance to his rival.

Now, the above paragraphs are somewhat of the nature of a footnote elevated to the text. But they are necessary at this point in these memoirs to explain the coolness with which Laura and Carter viewed the near prospect of extinction. Neither of them of course in the least wished to die,

but it never occurred to them to face death with anything beyond the usual Coast philosophy.

"I shall stick Mr. K. for a rise in screw if we get through this," said Carter.

"If I hadn't made a promise," said the girl, "I could tell you something about your Mr. K. that would startle you."

"You're a tantalizing baggage, and I've a good mind to pick you up and shake it out of you. Gad! Here they come. Now, I'll shoot, and you get a box of matches and light those bombs for White-Man's-Trouble to throw."

"Bombs! Do you mean the cigarette-tins?"

"Yes. You'd a big brazing-lamp in the factory. Remember it? Well, you had. And that meant benzoline, I guessed. I found a drum full of it, anyway, and I've loaded up those tins with benzoline. It'll burn like winking in this sun, and the niggers'll never see the flame. Only thing to take care of, is not to set light to the factory. Now, do you understand?"

"Yes, dear."

"And d'you savvy, Trouble?"

"Savvy plenty. Oh, Carter, I burn my leg plenty-too-much with dem damhot lamp once on steamah. No can see flame when sun lib for shine. I fit for serve as stand-by-at-crane boy once, sar, on steamah."

"Well, Mr. Engineer, throw straight and don't get hoist by your own petard. By the living Jink we're in for it now. Throw, Trouble, for all you're worth, right into the blue of them."

The four-fifty repeater yap-yapped its messages, and the man who had learned to shoot quick and straight amongst the rabbits and grouse of Upper Wharfedale, made deadly practice at this bigger game. But two eight-shot Winchester are of very little more value than catapults in stopping

the rush of two hundred fighting black pagans officered by Moslemin Haúsas. Beforehand the fire of the Portuguese and the factory Krooboyas had held them off, much more by its noise than its deadliness. The one solitary shooter who remained, they held in scorn; he was firing white powder in the Winchester, and the smallness of the noise and the absence of smoke encouraged them. They scorned to shoot at him with their flintlocks. They would rush in and put this man to the matchet, and save the girl alive. And thereafter, when they rolled the red head at King Kallee's feet, and made the girl stand up before him, many and fine presents would be given to gladden them and their women.

So they gave the Okky yell, and sprang out of the bush into the open, and rushed across the clearing.

But lo, presently the white man called out, "Behold, I put ju-ju on you blighters," and a black man who carried between his brows the Kroo tribal mark began throwing green tins which contained some liquid distilled by witchcraft. And thereupon the clinging fires of hell broke out amongst them, and burned the skin on their bodies till they screamed and danced in their frenzy of pain, and the air was rich with the smell of their cooking. Even Kwaka, who led them, though he was the boldest fighting man in all King Kallee's armies, showed by the grayness that grew upon his face that he that day learned the lesson of fear. And when presently they broke and fled for the bush (the flames, be it understood, still sticking to them), it was Kwaka who led that disordered retreat, and held a sleeve of his jelab before his eyes lest the white man might bring further witchcraft to bear, which would make his face a derision for the houris in Paradise.

"My Christian Aunt!" said Carter up on the factory veranda, "but benzoline is filthy stuff to fight with. The

place stinks like a cookshop, and I feel like a beastly Russian anarchist. Don't throw any more tins, Trouble. We've saved our bacon, Laura, I do believe, but I hate being unsportsmanlike. It's worse than netting your neighbor's grouse moor, this. But they came up to the gun too quick for me to stop them alone. White-Man's-Trouble, if you throw another of those infernal bombs, I'll slip a shot into you."

Laura was crouched in behind the mattress casemate, her face tucked away into the crook of an elbow, and her shoulders heaving with sobs.

"Hullo, old lady, what's the row with you? You're not hit? Good God, don't tell me you're hit. What a careless hound I am to let you get out of cover. I could have sworn there wasn't a shot being fired. What a miserably incompetent brute I am to get rattled and not see after you better."

"Oh, George, I'm not hit. I almost wish I were. That would be fairer."

Carter stared. "What's the matter, then?"

She pulled herself together with an effort. "I suppose I must feel very much as you do about the matter, only more so. You see I lit the matches for each bomb Trouble held out to me. It was I who am really responsible——"

Carter tackled the situation with ready wit. "Now, look here. I'm not going to have you presuming on being my sweetheart. I know you'd like to have the credit of routing the enemy, but you're not going to have it. I want all the kudos I can get in that line for business purposes myself. I'm going to point out in my report to Mr. K. that it was my brilliant genius alone that rootled out that drum of benzoline, and put it to a new and unpleasant use, and that any idea of refusing me the ten-pound a year rise in screw that I ask as a reward would be bang against all

O'Neill and Craven's most cherished traditions of fairness. So just you remember that, Miss Slade, and don't go off and brag about doing one single thing that wasn't ordered by your superior officer in this Service (as old Swizzle-Stick Smith would say), and that's me."

"You're a dear, good boy."

"I am," said Carter cheerfully. "I'm rather surprised people don't see it oftener. You're the first person in Africa who's made the discovery so far. Now I can't have you eating the bread of idleness out here any longer. Indoors you go, and tidy up." He took her by the arm and led her gently to the living room. "Hasn't that breeze made hay of the place? Sorry the houseboys have left this desirable situation without warning, and I can't lend you White-Man's-Trouble just now. So I want you to wade in, if you please, my dear, and show me what an extremely domesticated person the future Mrs. G. Carter can be when she tries. 'We wish to make a point,' said Mr. K. in one of his typewritten letters, 'of having all our factories neat and comfortable.'"

Laura shivered. "If I were to marry you, I wonder what K. would say."

"Say nothing. We should absolutely draw the line at interference there, eh? But in the meanwhile there is no harm in following out the gentleman's advice, which is invariably sound, on the other points."

"When you see Mr. K. I'm very much afraid you'll change your mind about me."

Carter drew the girl to him and kissed her on the lips. "Don't you be jealous of K., sweetheart. Mine's only a business admiration in that direction."

"At present," she persisted. "Wait till you meet."

"When we meet, I shall say, 'Sir, this very lovely and desirable young person here is my wife,' and then we shall

go on to commercial topics. There's nothing romantic about the boss. If you'd studied the Epistles of K. to the Coasters as closely as I have, you'd know that off by heart."

Laura still shook her head. "I love you," she said, "more than anything else in life, and I can think of no greater happiness than to be your wife. But I would never marry you if I thought you could repent of it afterwards. You can't deny that you are wrapped up in K. You must see K. before you marry me, George."

"If K. comes along before the parson, well and good, you shall have your own way of it. But if a missionary of the right complexion (if there is such a thing down here) casts up at this factory, there'll be a wedding cake put on the festive board, Miss Slade, and you'll be the bride that'll cut it. Don't you try and wriggle out of your solemn promises with me. Hullo, what's that?"

"Thunder. Is the tornado coming again?"

"No, listen. It isn't thunder. It's people thumping monkey-skin drums. I've made dozens of those tuneful instruments for the curiosity dealers at home, so I know the note. Well, you get on with your dusting, there's a nice girl, and I'll go out and have a cigarette."

"You are going—to——"

"What, clean up the mess outside? No, we'll leave that for the present. Now, don't be scared, there's a sweetheart. But, to tell the truth, those drums interest me. The natives signal through the bush with them, you know, in a sort of dot-dash-dot style; and so far their local Morse alphabet has been a bit beyond me. Perhaps White-Man's-Trouble may be able to decipher it. Now, don't you try and shirk that dusting one moment longer."

He went out then onto the veranda, shutting the door behind him, and questioned the Krooboy sharply about the drummings. Did he understand them?

"Savvy plenty," said White-Man's-Trouble gloomily. "Dem Okky-man's drums."

"Well, I didn't suppose it was a Chinaman's, you patent idiot. You fit for understand dem tune?"

"Savvy plenty. Dem tune say Okky-men fit for make custom."

"That means 'ceremony,' I suppose. Now, what sort of a ceremony will suit the occasion? Dirge of defeat by the ju-ju men, presumably, and then they'll crucify some wretched slave so that his spirit can go into the Beyond and arrange to have the luck changed. I wish Mr. Smith were here, or Slade. No, I'm hanged if I do, though. I've worked this thing off my own bat so far, and I'll see it onto the finish. Dem Okky-men make crucify palaver?" he asked, and translated the hard word by standing up himself spread-eagled against the factory wall.

White-Man's-Trouble nodded a dismal assent. "Then, by an' by they grow plenty-too-much more brave, an' they come back one-time an' fight some more."

"Then you bet your woolly whiskers it won't do for us to sit quietly taking the air here. Ju-ju's the correct card to play in this country anyway."

The Krooboy shivered. "Oh, Carter, I no fit for touch ju-ju."

"Well, I am. With thought and care, I believe I should develop into a very good ju-ju practitioner. Besides, the subject fascinates me. No white men seem to know anything very definite about it, above the fact that it is beyond their comprehension, and it would be rather fine, if the unlikely happened, and one chanced to survive, to be known as the one authority on West African magic."

"Oh, Carter, if you meddle with dem ju-ju palaver you lib for die plenty soon. If you walk in bush, tree fall on

you; if you ride in canoe, arrow jump on you; if you chop,* dem chop he fill with powdered glass, and presently you lib for die of tear-tear-belly. Oh, Carter, you lib for Coast now one year; I lib for Coast all my life; I savvy plenty; you alle-same damfool."

"My dear Trouble, I've admitted already that I know meddling with ju-ju isn't altogether an insurance proposition. Much obliged to you for the fresh warning all the same. But I'm afraid your constitutional nervousness rather clouds that massive brain of yours at times, or you'd see that Smooth River factory and its three occupants are in the devil of a fix just now. You say the Okky-men when they've rubbed up their courage will presently return; and I don't dispute your reading of the omens. If they do come, we can't shoot them off, and that's a certain thing. As I'm sure Mr. Smith would say, it's a case of *Aut ju-ju aut nullus*, and to follow his rather objectionable knack of translating for a man who happened to have been at a different school to his own, that means we've either got to play the ju-ju card or be scuppered. White-Man's-Trouble, you are hereby made conjurer's confederate."

"I no fit."

"Am I to hurt your feelings with this piece of packing-case lid?"

"Oh, Carter, you look see. There's a nail in him there."

"I know there's a nail in it. The occasion demands a nail, and I picked the weapon for that reason. Now, then, are you going to obey orders, or will you take a first-class licking?"

"Oh, Carter, I fit for do what you say."

* In West Coast English to chop is to take food. Chop is food.

"Good. You're an excellent boy when you're handled the right way. Now go to the feteesh and bring the biggest coil of that inch lead piping you can stagger under."

Carter himself went to Slade's room and brought from there one of those crude carved wooden figures which the natives make and the traders pick up as curiosities. At home they are sold for stiff prices as the gods of the heathen; but the negroes that make them are not idolaters, and what they exactly are for the present writer knoweth not, save only that they are not articles of worship. Locally they come under that all-embracing term ju-ju, which includes so much and explains so little.

Carter found a brace and bit—an inch twist bit, which for a wonder was in a calabash of yellow palm oil, and so not rusty—and he worked on these carved men till the sweat ran from him. Laura came out and told him that he was inviting an attack of fever, which was obvious, since by then it was high noon, and violent exertion for a white man with the thermometer above par always has to be paid for on the Coast. But he drove her back again into the house and out of the heat with a volley of chaff, and went gaspingly on with his tremendous work.

The mouths of the figures were wide, but with knife and drill he splayed them wider, but was careful always not to distort them beyond the canons of local art; and in a couple of hours' time he was ready for White-Man's-Trouble and the heavy coils of lead piping.

"Regard," he said, "O thou assistant to the great white ju-ju man. We will place one of these graven images opposite the entrance of each road which comes from the bush into this factory clearing. We'll hoist it up onto a green gin box, so, and give it a bit more height and dignity. And we'll add a necklace of these green cigarette tins, which have already advertised themselves into an ugly

notoriety. Then, into this hole you see in the back of each image, we will fit an end of lead piping, and as the holes are tapered, the unions will make themselves good. Then, O helper of dark schemes, we'll pay out the coil, as far as possible in swamp where it will sink out of sight, and bring all the ends into the house here. Any piping that shows, you must throw earth over. Savvy? And the inside ends we'll splay out with this hardwood cone that I've made, till a man can get his mouth well into them and shout down the tube comfortably. I'm sure you catch the idea?"

"Oh, Carter, I plenty-too-much afraid. Presently I lib for die."

"Not you. If I see any signs of your starting to fade away, I'll whack you into life again with a piece of board with two nails in it. Wherefore, O feared of the uninitiated, buck up, and get a shovel, and cover that lead out of sight where it shows. Afterwards I'll show you the working of that early British contrivance, an office speaking-tube. That is, if we have time for a rehearsal, but by the extra big dot-dashing of those monkey-skin drums just now, it rather looks as if we shall have the next act of this play crowding down on us without much more interval."

The burned warriors had not, it appeared, retreated very far. Their spiritual advisers, the ju-ju men, had by King Kallee's orders been waiting not very far away down the several bush roads; and when presently fugitives began to come trotting in through the steamy forest shades, these ecclesiastics rallied them, and when enough were collected, they commenced a "custom" for the renewal of the soldier's bravery.

Savage superstitions, savage terrors, savage thrill at the raw smell of blood were all worked upon with a high

dexterity. King Kallee had made a fine art of these incitements; he had gained a throne by their practice, and had handed them on to chosen ministers, who practised the cult of ju-ju with a single eye to advancing the interests of their king.

The black soldiers were wearily tired, and many of them carried wounds. They listened at first with a sullen torpor. They heard without interest that the white man's bullets were non-consecrate, and therefore the wounds they made would soon heal. They learned, with a little thrill of wonder, that the green tins which poured burning flame were not true ju-ju, since the King of Kallee's ju-ju men declared them unorthodox. And by degrees their dull nerves were worked up till at the proper moment sacrifice was made, and the screams and smells of the victim maddened them. Even the Haûsa officers, who were Moslem, and therefore contemptuous disbelievers in all pagan ceremony, were stirred up almost equally with their men, and when as a final exhortation they were bidden to return once more to the factory, and bring the red head and the white girl as presents for the King, they forgot their qualms and their burns, and led on with a new, fierce courage.

But whether the African be savage bushman or cultivated Moslem gentleman, superstition is part of the very marrow in his backbone. These men had felt the bullets, they had felt the infernal burnings of the benzoline, but they were wound up now to a pitch above dreading either. Orders were given to concentrate in the edge of the bush, as near to the clearing as they could get without being sighted from the factory, and then when all was ready the monkey-skin drums would beat the charge.

The first comers peered through the outer fringe of the cover, and saw the clearing desolate, and the factory buildings to all appearance tenantless. The dead that they had

left in their hurried retreat still lay where they had dropped, and glared up glassy stares at the outrageous sun. But with eyes keen to pick up any hint at ju-ju charm, the gaze of all this vanguard fell on five little wooden mannikins set opposite the points where the several bush roads cut into the open.

There was nothing new about the mannikins themselves. They were merely the things that their own uncles and their grandfathers carved for a purpose which they themselves knew better than did that tricky white man with the red head who had doubtless put them there. But then each of these mannikins was perched on a pedestal made of one or more green gin cases, and that in itself looked suspicious—or, in other words, smacked of ju-ju. And, moreover, each was garlanded with those infernal green cylinders which they had just been informed officially were in truth not orthodox ju-ju, but which they knew from their own painful experience could, upon occasion, vomit forth the most horrible flames.

They crouched in the edge of the cover once more thoroughly shaken, and it only required the final portent to fray their courage utterly.

In the factory, tucked snugly out of sight in the mess-room, Laura Slade, Carter and White-Man's Trouble lay stretched out wearily upon the floor. A length of match boarding had been stripped away from the wall, and only a paling of vertical bamboos stood between them and the external world.

It was the code message of the monkey-skin drums, as read by White-Man's-Trouble, that first gave them the news that the Okky-men had rewound up their courage and were returning once more to the attack; and so they promptly retired out of sight. Guns and defenders would have been

a reassuring touch to the enemy, who had seen such things before. But for them to find no guns, and no human beings in view, would accentuate the effect of the graven images which gazed woodenly upon them from the green gin-box pedestals.

For long enough they lay there in the sickly heat, staring out over the litter of the morning's battlefield, which danced up and down in the shimmering sunlight. The factory lizards came out in full numbers for their daily sun-baths, and most of the flies of Africa seemed to be congregated in the clearing.

Laura caught the first note of invasion. "Do you see," she asked, "those two swallow-tailed butterflies flittering about by that big silk cotton-wood that lost his top in the tornado? They were feeding contentedly enough on that stuff like meadow-sweet, but someone or something disturbed them, and they flew up. If you notice, they dare not go back, so that rather hints that the someone is still hidden in the meadow-sweet."

"Which said clump," observed Carter, "is just two yards off the graven image which commands bush road number three. Oh, assistant conjurer, canst thou swear?"

"Oh, Carter," said the Krooboy with simple dignity, "I no bush-boy. I speak English. I learn him on steamah. I work up to position of stand-by-at-crane boy before I lib for come ashore to work at factory. Ah, Carter, I savvy swear-palaver plenty-much-too-good. You fit for hear me?"

"Not for one instant. I want you to make all your remarks in Kroo, or preferably Okky, if you aren't too rattled to remember any of that fashionable tongue. Here, put your sweet lips to the tube, and just say in the thickest language you can think of 'Get away back to Okky City, you bushmen. If you hesitate, your noses shall drop off,

and your great fat lips shall follow, and red ants shall spring up out of the earth to eat them whilst you wait.' Savvy the idea?"

"Savvy plenty," said White-Man's-Trouble, and rattled venom into the tube with a savage gusto.

The result was sufficiently surprising. Spear-heads and gun-barrels bristled suddenly upwards from the clump of meadow-sweet, as ambushed Okky-men scrambled to their feet. For a full two minutes they stood there listening to the abuse which they heard pouring from the lips of the wooden mannikin close beside them, with eyes goggling, and mouths gaping, and knees chattering, the worst scared blacks in all the Oil Rivers.

For the moment they were mesmerized by fright. But then the two mannikins which were nearest on either side began cackling with uncanny laughter, and a ju-ju man who was with them recognized an art higher than his own, and allowed the superstition that was native to him to rub away the thin veneer of his education. "Let us begone from here," he moaned, "even if it be to meet the curved execution axe of King Kallee in Okky City. Better the sharp edge of that, yes, better even lingering days on the crucifixion tree than the neighborhood of these devils. Wood they are now, I do believe. But they can talk as no thing of wood ever could talk; and presently they will come to life, and hurl at us those green tins of liquid fire with which they are garlanded. If there are any that wish to see more, let them stay. For myself I return to Okky City, even if it means impalement."

The other wooden mannikins broke out into words, and immediately the bush around each of them rippled with men. Carter, whose knowledge of the native was growing, used every syllable of his vocabulary down two tubes alternately.

Laura, who had grown up bilingual, commenced at first timidly. But the desperate peril of their surroundings, the excitement of battle, the thrill of seeing men run, the drop of negro blood that colored her veins, were all circumstances that presently whirled her into a resistless torrent of words. Never had she spoken with such a fluency; never had she framed such sentences. It was all in the Okky tongue, accurate, biting, glib, telling. Carter broke off from his own halting speech to listen. He could not speak the language yet with any great ease, but he could understand almost every word. He chilled as he listened to her. He coughed a warning. He called sharply that she should stop. But that drop of negro blood held her to her speech. The Krooboy, thoroughly warmed up to his work, was yelling infamies down a tube at the other end of the mess-room. Laura, with eyes glinting and hands clinched, was growing almost beside herself with speech. . . . Carter gripped her arm and plucked her almost savagely away.

"You had better shut up. The Okky men have gone, minutes ago, and I do not think you know what you are saying. Laura, do you hear me?"

She stared at him, and then spoke with a dry throat. "I said only what you told me. It was to save our lives. And you—you could not understand what I said. It was Okky talk; you surely could not follow it. Why do you look at me like that? George, what is it?" She laughed rather wildly, and plucked herself away from him. "Oh, I see. Well, I warned you before that I was black, and now I suppose you believe me."

He returned her look steadily enough. "My dear girl, you've gone through more than you can stand, and you've just worn yourself to rags. I never quite knew what hysterics meant before, but I fancy that in about two minutes

more you would show me. Now the trouble's over; we've fixed 'em tight this time, and you needn't worry yourself any more. Just you go to your room and lie down and sleep."

"Sleep! You think I could sleep?"

"Very well," he said coolly, "then Trouble and I must wait till you can. But please understand, my sweetheart, that until you have put in a four-hours' spell of sleep, and can get up rested to stand a watch, neither the boy nor I must close an eye. So you see it's up to you to arrange whether we shall all have a dose of overwork or not."

She came to him and put her slim brown hands on his shoulders and looked him in the face. There were black rings under her eyes, and her cheeks were white and drawn, but somehow with her delicious curves she appealed to him more than ever, and he let her see it in his glance. "You still call me by that name," she said, "you still call me sweetheart even after what you have seen and heard?"

"Of course. Don't be stupid. A man doesn't change towards a girl just because she happened to get a bit excited when she was doing her best to save his life. I'm half sorry now I stopped you, only the myrmidons of my rival, his Majesty of Okky, had run away, and you really were rather working yourself up." He drew her to him and kissed her on the forehead. "And now you will go and turn in, won't you, like a good girl?"

"I'll do anything my lord wishes. But you will look after yourself, promise me?"

"Rather."

"Let your boy get you a meal. You've not had a crumb all day, and you must be starving. It was horribly careless of me not to have thought of it before."

"That is rather a bright idea. Had anything yourself? No, I see you haven't. Well, we'll sup, Laura, before you're

packed off to bed. It's five o'clock in the afternoon, but we'll call it supper. Trouble?"

"Oh, Carter?"

"We fit for chop. You kill two tin, one-time."

"Oh, Carter, three tin. Me one, Missy two——"

Bang went a gun, as it seemed to their jangled nerves, close at their elbows. They all started violently, and the girl clutched convulsively at Carter's sleeve.

"Dem Okky cannon," wailed the Krooboy, and burrowed forthwith into the casemate of bedding.

"Not it," said Carter. "It's all right, Laura. It's a steamer's mail gun. I never heard the roar of a loaded cannon till this morning, but once heard, you can't mistake it for blank cartridge."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely. I jumped when the thing went off, but then I suppose we're all a bit fagged. Here, Trouble, you shirker, get dem chop one-time, and then find some limes. We shall have the steamer people ashore in ten minutes, and when they hear the yarn they'll want about five cock-tails apiece to congratulate us in. Lord! Laura, but I'd give a tooth and two finger nails to have Mr. K. dropping in on us during the next hour or so to see the fine way we've saved O'Neill and Craven's factory from a total loss. I believe he'd raise my screw with such a jump that you and I might get married out of hand. Let's see, what boat's due? I've hardly got your time-table in my head; one gets rusty at Malla-Nulla."

"It's the *M'poso*, George. She's straight out from home. Just think, you may really have K. descending on you in half an hour's time."

"No such luck. It will be Cappie Image-me-lad, with his green umbrella and his best thirst, and that hearty ruffian Balfarnie, who'll rob every corpse in the clearing if

he thinks he can collect one Aggry bead and a good slave dagger. By Gad, I wonder if I can screw some money out of Balgarnie. I sent at least eighty sovereigns' worth of most carefully made curios home with him last time the *M'poso* tried to roll herself over off our beach at Malla-Nulla."

"I think," said the girl, "I'll just go to my room for a minute."

Carter pointed the finger of derision at her. "O vanity," said he. "You're going to tidy your hair, and smarten your frock just for the sake of old Cappie Image and the plump Balgarnie. By the way, now that you are an engaged young woman, are you going to let those genial old ruffians take you on their knees and kiss you, just in the old sweet way? Of course, don't mind me if you'd like it so."

"Pouf!" said Laura, "they've both known me ever since I was a baby, but I'll be as distant with them as you like if you feel jealous, sir."

"I think I'll wash off some of the battle scars myself," said Carter. "One looks a bit melodramatic in this filthy, smeary mess. Not to mention uncomfortable. I suppose, by the way, somebody will turn up to pay a polite call. They'll judge that something's wrong when they see that all the factory boats and canoes have been cleared out of the creek."

Even White-Man's-Trouble stole palm oil and attended to his toilette in honor of the expected visit, and it was a very gleaming and oily Krooboy in some clean (stolen) pyjama trousers of Slade's that showed Captain Image, and his passenger, and purser up the stair.

Laura and Carter were there, spruce and smart, to receive them, and Laura said, "Kate! I knew you'd come,"

and ran forward and shook the passenger by the hand. "There, you see, George," she said over her shoulder, "how accurately I can keep a secret."

"Hullo, Carter, me lad!" said Captain Image. "Glad to see you looking so fit. You're a fine advertisement for those pills of mine, and I'm sure you're glad now you kept away from old Swizzle-Stick Smith's nostrums. You seem to have been having a bit of a scrap round the factory here. However, we will hear about that, and have your tally of the cargo you want to ship from here and Malla-Nulla afterwards. But for the present I want to introduce my passenger and your boss, Miss O'Neill."

Carter swallowed with a dry throat. "Mr. K. O'Neill's sister?"

"Miss Kate O'Neill, who is head of O'Neill and Craven."

Carter blinked tired eyes, and saw a girl of three-and-twenty, half a head shorter than Laura Slade, dressed as simply, but with that something that somehow speaks of Europe, and money, and taste. Her eye was brown and her hair was the color of his own—nearly. No, it was darker. She was holding out a hand to him—a neat, plump hand that looked white, and firm, and cool, and capable, and which somehow or other he found in his own.

"Laura calls you George, I notice," he heard her saying.

"Yes, of course she would. We are engaged, you know."

He felt his hand dropped with suddenness, and up till then he had never known how thoroughly objectionable a laugh could be when it came from the lips of Mr. Balgarnie. Everything swam before him, and he lurched against the messroom wall. But with an effort he pulled himself together. "Miss Slade and I are engaged. We are to be married as soon as we can afford it. When you

look round, and see how we've saved the factory from the Okky-men, we hope you'll raise my salary."

"Yes, I think I can promise to do that," said Kate O'Neill. "I had my eyes open when I came across the clearing. But do you think you are wise to marry?"

"Ha, ha, Carter, old fellow," laughed little Captain Image, "got you there! Get dollars first. Find connubial bliss later."

"But," continued Miss O'Neill, "you and I and Laura will talk over that later when we are alone."

Captain Image felt that he cleared away an awkward situation with all the savoir faire of a shipmaster. "Well, Carter, me lad," said he, "we know you've had a lot of lessons from old Swizzle-Stick Smith, but what about a cocktail? My Christian Aunt, look out, Balgarnie, there's Laura fainting."

Carter stared at them dully but did not try to help. "My God," he muttered, "to think I never guessed that K. could stand for Kate."

CHAPTER VIII

PRESENTS THE HEAD OF THE FIRM

"I DON'T care what you say, Purser, me lad," Captain Image repeated, "but I call Miss O'Neill pretty."

"Well," admitted Mr. Balgarnie, who prided himself on being a bit of a judge, "she may be that as well, but I still stick to it that her face is what I call strong."

"I hate the word 'strong.' When a she-missionary is too homely looking to be anything else, she prides herself on wearing a strong face."

"No, sir. 'Intense' for lady missionary," Mr. Balgarnie corrected.

"Strong," snapped his superior officer. Captain Image was of Welsh extraction and disliked contradiction.

The purser shifted his ground. "Well, at any rate, sir, you'll own she's mighty standoffish. I used to call good old Godfrey O'Neill, Godfrey, and therefore naturally I called his daughter Kate, and told her why. She didn't seem to hear me."

"She wasn't Godfrey's daughter, anyway. Godfrey never married, but I believe he'd nieces. Probably Miss Kate is one of them. The old man must have left her the business. Thing that amazes me is the way she's taken her grip of the concern, and made it hum."

"And kept it dark even in Liverpool that she was a woman. That old head clerk of hers, that people thought was the manager, must be a rare close-lipped one."

"He is, blight him!" said Captain Image with emphasis.

"I called in there two or three times after I'd got some of those please-buck-up letters from O'Neill and Craven, that I didn't care about, and the cauliflower-headed old humbug clean took me in. He was Mr. Crewdson, to be sure; no, he was not Mr. K. O'Neill; no, I couldn't see Mr. K. just then; no, he couldn't make an appointment for me with the gentleman; anything I wanted he would attend to personally. If I re-read the letters he was sure I should find that they were not unreasonable, but, on the other hand, would put me in the way of earning extra commission on cargo for myself. So it ended in my being civil to him, and he was really nothing more than a clerk. You can just picture to yourself, Purser, what I felt when I found out that I'd been civil to a clerk by mistake."

• "It was pretty hard lines, sir."

"Of course a West African merchant's business is a rum contract for a young girl to catch hold of, and I don't say Miss Kate was wrong in keeping in the background to start with. In fact I'll own up straight that she was right, and the proof's plain in the way that firm's come back to life. Why, Purser, I'll bet you a bottle of Eno that O'Neill and Craven are doing just double the turn-over now they did twelve months ago."

"You'll know best about that, sir," said Mr. Balgarnie with a sigh, as he remembered that only Captain Image touched commission on the cargo which the *M'poso* collected on the Coast. "But I will own up that she has got the knack of making all the smarter men in the firm both on the Coast and at Liverpool keen on her when they thought she was a man. Of course it was a bit unlikely that the old-timer palm-oil ruffians like Swizzle-Stick Smith and Owe-it-Slade would take to new ways that meant more work, all at once, though for that matter I'll bet Slade put off making up his mind for so long as to

whether he liked hustling or he didn't, that finally he dropped into the new ways without knowing it."

"Slade's gone off up-country to find the firm a rubber property, Purser, me lad. Laura told me about it last night. She hasn't heard of him once since he pulled out of Smooth River, and she's very anxious about him. I hope none of those up-country bushmen have chopped Slade. I should be sorry to lose that man. He owes me a matter of three sovereigns, and that old Holland gun of mine that he borrowed for half an hour eighteen months ago has gone up-country with him. I believe he's in the ribs of the fo'c'sle shop, too, for the thick end of a fiver."

"Four-seventeen-nine. I've given both Chips and the bo's'n a rare dressing down about it. They've no business to let anyone with Slade's reputation have as much tick as that. The bo's'n's new to the Coast—our bo's'ns always do seem to die, sir—but old Chips ought to know that's no way to run a fo'c'sle shop. They can chuck away their own money as they choose, but I told them both plainly that I can't afford to drop my share in a sum like that."

"Nor can I," said the other sleeping partner. "You can let both Chips and the bo's'n understand that unless I see a good round sum in hard cash as my share of profits when we get back to Liverpool, they don't ride in the old *M'poso* next trip. They can put their book debts where the monkey put the nuts. They don't pay me out with those. No, by Crumbs!"

"Miss Kate, by the way, was mighty anxious to know what profits there were in fo'c'sle shops. Of course I said I'd heard of them on other boats, but we'd never allow such a thing on the *M'poso*."

"Um," said Captain Image thoughtfully, "that tale's all right for most passengers, but I don't think I'd have risked it with Miss Kate. She strikes me as being a young woman

who likes to hear one's opinion on things, but generally has her own information on the matter already cut and packed beforehand. I told her last night how sorry I was to see all that cargo waiting at the factory with no Kroo-boys to work it out of their creek to the steamboat. By Crumbs! Balgarnie, me lad, she'd nipped off back to the *M'poso* here, and had hired our own blessed deck passenger boys for the job before you could say 'gin.' You know what an independent lot they are, going home with money in their pockets. I bet you a box of oranges you couldn't name me two white men on the Coast who could have persuaded them. But she did it, one-time, and only paid regular wages, too. Dressed for dinner in the evening when she'd finished, just as if she was merely a tripper going home from the Islands, and hadn't an object in life outside trying to tickle the boys with her looks. I tell you, Miss Kate's a very remarkable young woman, Balgarnie, me lad, and if she doesn't peg out here on the Coast, or go broke over floating a rubber swindle, or get married and chuck it, I shall feather my nest very nicely over the cargo she gets shipped."

"I say, Captain, what's between her and Laura? They seem to know one another pretty intimately."

"Met in Las Palmas when they were kiddies. Pass me the compasses off the chart table. My pipe's jammed. Thank you, me lad. Owe-it-Slade got two years' tick at that convent school out on the Telde road for Laura, and Miss Kate was running about the islands a good deal then with old Godfrey. Godfrey had a tomato farm out past Santa Brigida, and they used to have Laura up there for all her holidays. By Crumbs, Purser, me lad, how that little girl's shot up. It's a dashed pity she's a nigger."

"D'you suppose Carter knows it?"

"If he doesn't I shan't tell him, and don't you; for two

reasons. First, there's Miss Kate to be thought of. I watched the way that girl eyed him, and by Crumbs, I tell you, me lad, I was glad he was booked. She's going to stay out here on the Coast for a good spell, and he'll be close and handy, and somehow I've got the opinion that red-headed chap is just the sort of man she'll marry. He's not a beauty, but he's a good, tough, wholesome face on him; he's a lot struck on her; and he's a gentleman. I can do with her bossing; she's a nice way of wrapping up her pill and ramming it home with a smile. But I'd not like to see a red-haired youngster I brought out here as a clerk eighteen months ago, head of the O'Neill and Craven concern and expecting me to knuckle under. I'd do it, of course; I'd be civil to old Harry himself, me lad, if he could bring cargo to the *M'poso*; but I'll not deny to you it would stick if I had to start ladling out champagne in this chart house to Carter, and sit and listen whilst he strutted out his views on the decay of British influence in West Africa."

"It would be pretty tough," Mr. Balgarnie admitted. "But you said there was another reason you wanted him to marry Laura."

"Well, I do. I like that girl. I knew her when I first came down the Coast as mate. I remember the first time I saw her as if it was yesterday. I was standing up against the tally desk beside number three hatch, ticking off the cargo list as they hove stuff up and dropped it in the surf boats. It was on the old *Fernando Po*, that beat her bottom out afterwards when Williams tried to drive her over Monk bar at half ebb. There was a case marked with double-diamond that was O'Neill and Craven's consigning all right, but with no name of factory. I knew old Swizzle-Stick Smith and Malla-Nulla well enough already, and I didn't know Slade, and so naturally I thought Smith

should have it, and ordered the case back again into the hold. But just then up came a little nipper of about eight or ten years old, as self-possessed as you like, and says, 'Are you Mr. Image?' 'That's me,' says I. 'What's the message?' 'Oh, no message,' says she, 'only Daddy says that if I can find you and stand by your heels and not bother I may stay aboard, but if not I'm to go ashore by the next boat and get on with my lessons.' Well, it didn't take much seeing through what was meant there."

"No, sir," said Mr. Baggins heartily. "By all accounts old Cappie Williams was the hardest case they ever knew even on the West Coast, and that's saying a lot. I only knew him for a year, and I wasn't particular in those days, but he was more than even I could stand."

"He was the limit. Well, me lad, that was the first time I saw Laura, and she stood beside me half the day at the tally desk there, and thanked me for the entertainment when Slade sent off a boy to take her ashore. She gave me a kiss when she turned to go down the side—well, you see, I've—I've never quite forgotten that kiss, Baggins, me lad."

"I know, skipper," said Mr. Baggins rather thickly. "A kid once kissed me, of her own blessed accord, too, like that. It sort of burnt in. I beg your pardon, sir, for interrupting."

"Not at all, me lad. Here you, steward. Hi, Brass-Pan."

A Krooboy ran up.

"We fit for two cocktail, plenty-long ones. Well, as I was saying, Baggins, me lad, I've always had a bit of soft place for Laura, though I suppose she rightly is snuff and butter, by Crumbs you'd never guess it from her looks unless you went over her with a lens, and I'd just feel all broken up if she was to go the way that lot usu.'ly do go.

So if this young Carter, who seems a nice clean-run sort of lad, will marry her with a ring, I'm going to weigh in with at least a best silver-plate teapot for a wedding present."

"You can put me down for the ditto sugar and cream," said the purser with emotion. "It was a kiddie just like Laura I was fond of myself. Only—only— Well, Skipper, I suppose a good many of us are blackguards down here on the Coast. Why the sulphur doesn't your boy bring those cocktails?"

But at this point Captain Image broke off the conversation. "By Crumbs!" said he, "here's Miss Kate." And then he did a thing that made Mr. Baggins whistle with sheer surprise. He went down the ladder to help his passenger on board.

"Now, if I had done that," the Purser mused to himself, "it would have meant a lot. But my Whiskers! I never thought I should live to see old Cappie Image trotting down onto the front doorsteps to receive a mere female passenger. The Old Man must see enough solid dollars in that girl to buy himself that hen farm outside Cardiff he hopes to retire upon."

Captain Image stood on the grating at the foot of the ladder and waved his panama in respectful salutation. The beer-colored river swirled along the steamer's rusty flank a foot beneath him, and the pungent smell of crushed marigolds which it carried made him cough. The sun shimmered exactly overhead in a sky of the most extravagant blue, and the greenery which fenced in the slimy mud banks hung in the breathless heat without so much as a twitter.

Miss Kate O'Neill was seated in a Madeira chair which stood on the floor of a big green surf boat, and the gleaming Kroobys perched on the gunwales paddled with more than their usual industry. The headman, who straddled

at the steering oar in the stern, wore a tail-coat of an extremely sporting cut and pattern and a woven grass skull-cap in honor of the occasion. And all this pomp and circumstance was uninvited. But somehow people had the knack of offering special service and deference to Miss O'Neill.

The only other woman on the *M'poso*, the austere wife of a Benin trader, looked over the steamer's rail in gloomy disapproval. These were no modes for Coast wear. A billowy grass-green muslin dress that no Krooboy laundryman could wash twice without spoiling; neat, narrow pipe-clayed shoes with no thickness of sole, and ridiculous heels; a pale green felt hat, actually insulted by a feather in its band; and final absurdity of all, a parasol, a flimsy thing of silk, and ribbon, and effervescent chiffon, which would be absolutely ruined by a splash of rain, instead of the big sensible white cotton affair, with the dark green lining, which all ordinary people know is the standard wear on that torrid Coast.

"Faugh," said the trader's wife, "and Captain Image says she's one of the smartest business women in the world to-day, and that fat, greedy purser would propose to her in the next five minutes if he thought he'd a cat's chance of being accepted. They think her good-looking, too, I'll be bound, just because she wears those unsuitable clothes, and has pink color in her cheeks. Well, the clothes will be whisps of rag by this day week and"—the poor woman sighed here—"the Coast will get the color and the plumpness out of her face, and make her as lean and yellow as the rest of us in a month."

"You're a good, kind man," Miss O'Neill was saying to a very smiling Captain Image, "and I know I did tell the bedroom steward to have my big trunks got up on deck; but, you see, I'm a woman, and therefore it's my preroga-

tive to be able to change my mind without being openly abused for it. So I want you, please, to be very nice and let me stay on the *M'poso* a little longer."

"Miss Kate, I was sure you'd find that what I said was true, and that Smooth River factory was no place for a lady like you. You see those dead niggers are fresh now, but when the sun gets on 'em—er—I mean there's no trade coming into this section of the Coast just now till that blessed old King of Okky opens the roads again, and he won't do that yet awhile on his own dirty account, and neither you nor I have got the ju-ju that will make him. My dear Miss, I'm just as pleased as a monkey with green—er—with a green tail to hear you're going to take the round trip home with me, and if my clean collars do run out, you must remember that we all wear panjammers when we're south of the Islands and the trippers. If only I'd thought of shipping a jack-wash when I got my Krooboys at Sarry Leone. Well, one can't be prepared for everything."

The girl laughed. "I wouldn't strain the supply of collars for worlds. I only want you to take me two days on from here and drop me at this factory again on the way back."

The tint of Captain Image's vermilion face deepened to plum color. He scented irony, and his touchy Welsh temper bubbled up into view. "Miss," he said, "when I pull my anchors out of Smooth River mud in ten hours from now, I go out on the flood across the bar, and as you must know I walk in and do the civil in Water Street, Liverpool, before I smell the stink of these particular mud banks again."

She slipped a plump firm hand on his white drill sleeve. "Won't you ask me into the chart house, Captain, and send Brass-Pan for some tea? I'm absolutely dying for tea."

And you can have a cocktail. I've got a long story I want to tell you. There's cargo waiting for you, Captain, up a creek that opens off Smooth River which you've never been up, and which I think will pretty well fill the *M'poso* without your troubling to call anywhere else."

Captain Image's face cooled to vermilion again, and puckered into a smile in spite of himself. He even went so far as to pat the fingers that rested on his arm. "By Crumbs, Miss, I'd ordered them to boil up that tea when I saw you shoot out of the factory creek in your surf boat, and till you reminded me, I'd clean forgotten it. And here you've been standing and yarning to me on the front door step all the time. They'll call the *M'poso* a dry boat with a vengeance if this tale gets about. I shall be chaffed to death over it. Come up on top."

Mr. Balgarnie saw them ascending the ladder, and rushed into the chart house and pulled down three photographs that had been fastened on the wall with drawing pins since Miss Kate O'Neill's departure. He was thumped on the back by his grateful skipper who caught him in the act of pocketing them.

"Balgarnie, me lad," said Captain Image, "you'll have to keep that hard collar of yours bent for two days longer. You'll be pleased to hear that Miss Kate's not going to throw us over yet. Just you go and see the chief steward and the cook and ask them what they've got left in the refrigerator. And I want you to break the rule of the ship, and make all the other passengers jealous, and dine at my table in honor of the occasion. Come in, Miss, and please take the settee. You'll find this cushion soft and free from mildew."

Kate smiled gratefully on them both. "What dear, good people you are. And I made sure you would detest me, Captain, when I tell you I want you to change from your usual routine."

Captain Image's face stiffened.

"Even though it is to get all your holds full of cargo which you would never have touched if it had not been for a hint that just came to me an hour ago."

"We carry mails, you know," said Image doubtfully, "and there's a scheduled time for call at the various points, and a bad time for being late. Bad——"

"But cargo. Let me suggest to you again, cargo?"

"Well, Miss Kate, there's no other lady on earth I'd say the same to, but I'll not deny the fact—to you, mind, and quite between ourselves—that cargo interests me. And letting you further into what's considered one of the dead-est of secrets, there are times when cargo commission can just out-balance fines for being late with mails. You see I guess what you have in your mind, Miss. You want me to run back and take off the cargo that's waiting at Malla-Nulla before those Okky-men come down and raid it."

Miss O'Neill lay back against the cushion and sipped composedly at her hard-boiled tea. "There," she said, "I knew you'd consent. There's only one little detail you've made a mistake about. How soon can you be off? Judging from the music of the winches, you're working in the cargo here at a famous speed."

"The mate reported to me just before you came on board that he'd have the lot shipped by five o'clock. Those passenger boys of ours that you've made factory boys for the time being were working splendidly, so Mr. Mate said. But what's this little mistake, Miss Kate? I can't go right away back to O'Neill and Craven's factory at Monk River, if that's what you mean."

"Oh, my dear Captain Image, don't think me unreasonable. I shouldn't dream of asking you to do such a thing as that. I don't even want you to go out over Smooth River bar for the present. But I'd better tell you just

what's happened. You see all afternoon the Krooboyes who had run away have been coming back, and some of the clerks have turned up, and then came Mr. and Mrs. da Silva. We had quite a gathering of it, and as Mr. Carter set them all on to digging holes and tidying things away as they arrived, by this time all the—well, you wouldn't know there'd been fighting.

"But the first to turn up at the factory after you'd left me there was not one of our own people, but a caller. He was the agent in charge of the German factory at Mokki. He turned up in a dug-out, and he gave us to understand that he was the most frightened man in Africa. He said his voyage down the creeks was one series of miraeulous escapes. He said he'd come to take shelter under the British flag; but when he found that by an oversight we hadn't got such a piece of furniture about the place, and when he saw the holes in the walls and the roof and the—the—what there was lying about under that blazing sun in the clearing, he was quite of opinion that he hadn't run far enough."

"The blighted Dutchman," said Captain Image contemptuously.

"Well, you see," said the head of O'Neill and Craven confidentially, "a chance like that suited me uncommonly well. To let you into a secret of our Liverpool office, I had reckoned on increasing the output of all our factories, and found I was doing it even more than I had calculated upon. Consequently when there was a big price bid for palm oil and kernels for autumn delivery, I sold heavily."

"And now the King of Okky has put ju-ju on you, stopped the roads, and there you are caught short, me lad—I beg pardon, Miss Kate, I should have said."

"Of course it only worried me for the moment. These tight places are never really tight if you take the trouble

to think out a way through to the other side. In this case it's shown itself to be delightfully simple. I've bought out the German."

Captain Image grunted. "Then I wish you'd asked me for advice first. But perhaps you haven't clinched the deal, and can back out of it still. If you'll take the tip from an old Coaster like me, you have nothing to do with it. His old Dutch factory's only worth scrap price."

"That's all I've given for it."

"And when you do get the oil out of it that's stored there, if it hasn't been looted whilst he's been away pleasuring down the creeks in his canoe, where are you? No better than here. Your trade will be dead. The King of Okky's stopped all the roads."

"Now, I'm just going to give you a little geographical surprise. Have you got a map?"

Captain Image indicated the drawers beneath the chart table. "Coast charts, of course, which include the river mouths, but I should pile up the old packet in a week if I relied on them. I'm my own pilot for the most part, Miss Kate, and that's why with God's Providence and a sound use of drugs I've managed to work successfully on the coast all these years."

"Well, if you haven't got a map of the back country here in your stock, I carry a very accurate one in my head, and if you'll give me a paper and a pencil, I'll draw out something that will surprise you."

The girl leaned over the chart table and began to draw, and Captain Image sat back on his camp stool and nursed a knee and frankly admired her. He did not in the least believe in this Mokki venture, and had not the smallest intention of breaking in upon his usual routine by going there. But he had (so he told himself) a distinct eye for the beautiful and the romantic, and he found his ideals in

these matters very considerably filled by Miss Kate O'Neill, her dress, and her occupations.

"There," she said at last, and handed him the sketch.

Captain Image looked at it, laughed, and shook his head. He had all of a sailor's intolerance for the amateur map-drawer. Moreover, he had traded in part of the Oil Rivers for twenty years, and if he did not know the back country personally, he heard it spoken of in the factories and in steamer smoke-rooms as matter of intimate knowledge almost daily.

"Well, Captain, don't just shake your head and laugh. Let me have your criticisms."

"I'm not saying, of course, that it's not a very clever map. It is that, and the way you've put the rivers in would beat the knowledge of many who have been on the Coast for years. You've quite the knack of drawing a map, Miss Kate, though there's another creek here that you've missed, and this continuation of what we call the Dog's-leg channel you must have guessed at, because I never heard of its being navigated, and nobody knows where it goes to."

"It leads to my new factory at Mokki."

"Well, it may do, though you can take it from me there's no water for a steamboat that draws even eleven foot six. But the thing you're mainly wrong in is this part you've marked as the Okky country. You haven't carried it anywhere near far enough back."

Miss O'Neill tapped at her firm white teeth with the end of the pencil. "You're quoting from the Royal Geographical Map," she suggested.

"Well, Miss, I am," Captain Image admitted, "and I know it's just about as inaccurate as magazine fiction in a whole lot of places. But I shouldn't set myself up to buck against a Royal Geographical map unless I knew."

"Neither should I. But you see maps have always been a fad with me, and since Mr. Godfrey died, and I had the whole weight of O'Neill and Craven landed upon my one pair of shoulders whether I liked it or not, I looked upon maps from a very different point of view. As everybody on the Coast knows everybody else's business, I need hardly point out to you that during Mr. Godfrey's latter days O'Neill and Craven had been allowed to run down pretty badly, and when I took hold, the firm was—well, what shall I say?"

"Dicky," suggested Captain Image kindly. "But I can quite understand all the hard words you'd like to let out if I wasn't here."

The girl laughed. "Well, we'll put it, Captain, that the firm was decidedly dicky, and I've had a most interesting time in pulling it onto its feet. Incidentally I've given up drawing maps from an amateur's point of view, and have been drawing them with an entire eye to business in the future. You've no idea how interesting it is to a business woman, Captain, when some special information comes to her and she is able to go to her map and fill in a mile or so of river that she'd had to leave a gap for, or sketch in a newly-discovered trade route through what was thought to be hopeless swamp, or fill in part of the boundary line of territory that up to then had merely merged off into blank space."

"My Crumbs," said Captain Image admiringly, "but you are a daisy, Miss Kate."

"It was only the day before I left Liverpool that I got news of where the Okky territory ended. The French have been having some mysterious expedition in at the back there for purposes of their own, and the officer in command very unwisely caned the only other white man with him, who was a Zouave, and wasn't really white at all. He wanted

revenge, so he came to me and told, and got fifty pounds, and said he'd never enjoyed letting off spite so much in his life before."

Captain Image smacked his knee. "Daisy isn't the word for you, Miss," he affirmed, "and you can tell people I said so, if you like. A young lady that can pull the leg of these beastly foreigners in that way is worth going a long way to meet. You oughtn't to come out here to the Coast. You ought to stay at home, Miss Kate, and marry a Member of Parliament."

"Poof! I wouldn't for worlds. They're all too pompous and too dull. They only talk, and pose for the newspapers; they never really do anything constructive in the House. Now, I like to do things; and if ever I marry, it will be a man who can do things that I've tried at rather better than I can do them myself. But we're getting away from the factory at Mokki. Now, the German agent doesn't know it, and I didn't feel called upon to tell him, but it's quite possible to open up trade routes to that point that don't pass through the Okky country at all. So that upsets the old King's notion of stopping the roads at present, and in the future, when he gets tired of cutting off his nose to spite his face, and tries to set trade going again, he'll find the stuff is being carried round very comfortably outside his boundary, and that there is no more blackmail to collect. How does that strike you, Captain? Now, am I a crazy woman who is bound to bust up O'Neill and Craven's if I am left long enough to it?"

"I never said that," Captain Image protested violently, "and I'll wring that pious old Crewdson's neck next time I see him. That man can't carry corn. He evidently gets a heap too loose tongue if you offer him just a little civility."

"Well, I really am awfully glad you're going to be nice,"

said Miss O'Neill as she handed back her teacup with a sigh of relief, "and steam off up to the creeks to Mokki when you've finished working the cargo here."

Captain Image stood with the empty teacup in his hand, revolving in his mind many things, and some of his muttered comments were profane. He carried throughout all the seaboard of West Africa a reputation for a hard obstinacy of which in his way he was not a little proud, as men can be of assets whose value is more than doubtful; and he arrived at the idea that this pretty young woman in the crisp grass green muslin was twisting him round to carry out her own peculiar wishes with ridiculous ease. "It's enough to make any man swear," declared Captain Image, as a final summing up of his sentiments.

"I agree with you cordially," said Miss O'Neill, "and as I am sure that you must have done tremendous violence to your feelings in letting me have so much of my own way, I'll just let you swear as a reward."

"No, I'm damned if I do, Miss Kate," said Image politely. "I shouldn't dream of forgetting what is due to a lady. But don't you be too sure of having your whim gratified even now. I don't see any way of getting the *M'poso* to Mokki up those bits of creeks unless we put wheels under her and pull her there through the bush."

"Have you ever seen a steamer called the *Frau Pobst*?"

"I have. She's a funny old brig-rigged relic, with sawn-off smoke stacks and no boats."

"No boats?"

"Oh, she started with some in the year one when she was built, but as they always got washed overboard when she found herself in a sea-way, I guess they grew tired of replacing them. I believe she does carry some patent folding concertinas tied up somewhere near her davits, but they're to pass the Dutch Board of Trade. They aren't for

use. Yes, I know the old *Frau Pobst*. She generally wants two crews each voyage."

"How's that?" asked Kate, with a twinkle.

"Goes so slow, the first lot die of old age." Captain Image smacked his lips over the pleasantries.

"What a labor it must have been to get an old tub like that up to Mokki."

"It would take her as many days as it would take me hours in the *M'poso*," said Image, and could have bitten out his tongue when the words escaped. But Kate O'Neill had got up from the settee and was shaking his hand. "I believe in reality, Captain, you're just as keen a business man as I am a business woman. Only you're shockingly shy about showing it. No, don't get up. I'm just going to run back ashore again to finish things up here. I'll be back by the time you've got steam. Please don't get up."

"By Crumbs, Miss Kate, but don't you try to dictate to me about that. I'm going to see you off from the front doorsteps myself. By Crumbs, there isn't another lady in Africa I admire half as much."

CHAPTER IX

NAVIGATION OF DOG'S-LEG CREEK

CAPTAIN IMAGE yapped out his commands to the third mate and a quartermaster in the wheelhouse in tones that supplied many missing adjectives:

"... Starboard your helm. Starboard. Hard-a-starboard, you bung-eyed son of perdition—stop her. Crumbs! but we sliced off a thumping big chunk of Africa there, and broke half the tumblers in the steward's pantry by the sound of it. I bet something big it's another case of going home on what's left of the double bottom, and Old Horny to pay in Water Street, Liverpool. Give her full ahead now, and steady your helm, quartermaster. My holy whiskers, who wouldn't sell a farm and go to sea? Starboard your helm, six points. There, steady on that. Half speed the engines." And so on over and over again for every hour since the sun rose to blister the swamps, and call forth the full volume of their earth and crushed-mari-gold smell.

There is a proverb bandied about amongst the sons of men which states that the unknown has always its charm, and harassed shipmasters often wonder why it is not publicly contradicted in Norie's *Epitome of Navigation*. Carter either forgot or never realized this, and furthermore made the fatal blunder of going up onto the sacred upper bridge without direct invitation.

For half an hour he had stood there silent, and unspoken to, listening to Captain Image's tirade against the creeks

that led to Mokki, and then catching for a moment the mariner's eye, ventured on an observation. He suggested that at any rate Captain Image would have the amusement of feeling that he was an explorer; and there was the opportunity the peppery Welshman really needed.

He had not been able to say what he wished to Miss Kate O'Neill, for many reasons; but here was her whipping-boy; and on him Captain Image turned loose one of the most powerful vocabularies that has ever been carried up and down the West African seaboard. He neglected both quartermaster and third mate—and these two experts, being only too glad of the breathing space, kept the *M'poso* accurately out of the mangroves, whilst their commander gave an undivided attention to the very highly qualified passenger who had dared to sully the unblemished deck plants of the upper bridge.

Now, under ordinary conditions, Carter would have recognized the circumstances, and have remembered his service, and swallowed the dose with a smile and a shrug. But things had gone woefully awry with him during the last score of hours. The strain of the fight, the discovery that the man K. O'Neill of the letters was Miss Kate in the flesh, the uncertain future of two Coast factories, the way in which everybody received his engagement to Laura Slade; all these things piled up on one another had set his usually steady nerves jangling in a way to which he was unaccustomed, and he felt himself forced by a rather insane impulse to do something startling. He had successive inclinations to throw up his berth altogether and go home; to marry Laura Slade out of hand by the kind assistance of Captain Image and the *M'poso's* log-book, which occurred to him as the local equivalent of Gretna Green; to violently abuse Miss Kate O'Neill for being herself. Finally, when the premonitory symptoms of a well-

earned dose of fever gripped him with a stab and a shudder, he had the usual malarial depression, which put the usual question as to whether life were really worth living.

Over and above all these things, since the first moment of seeing Kate, it had been borne in upon him that he had made a mistake over his engagement. He did not for a moment think of getting free; he was doggedly determined to see it through, or in other words to marry Laura, whatever the cost and result might be. But from that date onward he began to ask himself inconvenient questions. He demanded of his inner conscience a definition of that impalpable thing, love. He wished to be informed (from the same source and at the shortest notice) if he was exactly in love with Miss Slade at that particular moment, and when the phenomenon commenced, and how long it was likely to endure. And when Laura, who saw into a good deal more of all this than he expected, offered to release him from his promise, he abused her for the suggestion, and protested his affection for her with such warmth that he feared very much after the interview that he had hopelessly overdone it.

As a consequence, when Captain Image explained in a two-minute speech that Mr. Flame-tipped Carter was violating the etiquette of nations in daring to pollute that upper bridge with his undesirable feet, without direct invitation, he rather welcomed the opportunity and retorted in kind.

Now, Captain Image, as has been hinted, had made the most of the years he had spent sea-going in the matter of picking up a vocabulary; he has to this day brothers in Wales who are local preachers and revivalist leaders, and there is no doubt that he was the inheritor of some ancestral strain of burning eloquence. Carter, on the other hand, though not as a rule a man of much speech, had not

lived with Swizzle-Stick Smith all those long months without taking lessons in the art of vituperation, and though he was not conscious of it at the time, the education soaked in, and when the moment of stress arrived his memory served him faithfully.

Miss Kate O'Neill heard the discussion and retired to her room below. Stewards popped their heads round doorways and listened appreciatively; deck hands took cover round the angle of the houses and strained their ears, and the second engineer, who was bred on Tyneside and openly claimed to be a connoisseur, came out brazenly onto the top of the fiddley three yards from the speakers and did nothing to an unoffending ventilator cowl with a three-quarter inch spanner.

From the present writer's point of view the remarks on both sides had the fatal drawback that their point lay far more in artistic delivery than in their subject matter, and so to report them here verbatim would give a totally unjust idea of their weight and influence. But it must be understood that Captain Image, who never till now had met a foeman so worthy of his tongue, surpassed himself; and Carter, who now for the first time used these winged words in hard vicious earnest, felt all a sportsman's pride in seeing his verbal missiles land and rankle.

It is hard to award the victory; and, in plain truth, each orator was so warmed with the effort of his own tongue that in another second the British blood would have reached fisticuff temperature, and they would have clinched. But luckily an interruption arrived to break the tension. The third mate, that terribly abused young man who was gaining a breathing space whilst Carter stood up against Captain Image's tongue, at first conned the *M'poso* up the winding channel with a sigh of relief, and was ably seconded by the quartermaster at the wheel, who had also

been suffering. But by degrees their sporting instincts drew them from the matter immediately in hand, and made them interested spectators of the duel. In fact their interest absorbed them, and, well, the steamer got the smallest bit out of hand.

When it was too late the third mate turned attention to his duties again, and had just time to give four frenzied orders; there was a fine jangling of the engine-room telegraph; the quartermaster did frantic windmill work on the steering wheel, to the accompaniment of a rattling chorus from the wheel engines below; but the *M'poso* took a sheer and rammed her nose firmly into the mangroves. And in she slid. Weight and speed made sufficient momentum to put her into the mud and shrubbery well up to the forerigging, and the jar sent the stiff-set Captain Image flying onto the top of the fiddley gratings.

Carter shot up against the white painted rail of the upper bridge and held his balance there, and then with that blind instinct for interfering for the welfare of others which distinguishes the Anglo-Saxon, he vaulted the rail, picked up Captain Image and set him on his feet.

It is perhaps typical also of the peppery Welshman that he forgot the enjoyable quarrel so promptly that he said, "Thank you, me lad," with ready cordiality before he turned to do full justice to the third mate, his ancestry, and his probable future in this world and the next.

"By Jove," broke in Carter, "I wish I'd a gun. There's a monkey on the foredeck. I'd like that little beggar's skin. I wonder if I could catch him."

"Don't you try, me lad," said Image. "The odds are that the front end of this packet's a menagerie of red mangrove ants that could gnaw chunks off a tin-covered crusader." He jammed the engine-room telegraph with a vicious whirr to Full Speed Astern, and turned to the

unfortunate third mate. "Here, you, if you think you know enough to tell the difference between land and water, lower a boat and take out a kedge astern. Wait a minute. Now, you're not to drop that kedge in the mud. It'll draw through that like pulling a hairpin out of a pot of marmalade. You're to get ashore and hook it among those mangrove roots. Just try and get it into your intelligent head that I don't want that kedge to come home directly we put a strain on the wire. When you've done that you can come back and go to your room and read Shakespeare. I guess that's about all you blooming brass-bound *Conway* sailors are fit for, except sparking the girls and drawing your pay. By Crumbs! if we hadn't Miss Kate on board, and for anything I know within earshot, I could just give you an opinion of your looks that would make you want to cry."

But with the tide in the muddy river ebbing under her, the *M'poso* stuck in the dock she had made, in spite of reversed propeller, and winches straining on the kedge wire till they threatened to heave themselves bodily from the decks. The insect torments of Africa boarded her from the mangroves and bit all live things they came against; obscene land crabs dressed in raw and startling colors waddled up onto the slime of the banks as the water left them and blew impotent froth bubbles at the tough steamboat which even they could not eat. Parrots crowed at them from the shining green foliage of the mangroves alongside; slimy things gazed at them from the mud beneath the arches of the wire-like roots.

The sun crawled up into the aching blue overhead till it forgot how to cast a shadow, and the wet steam heat grew so oppressive that even Laura Slade, country-born though she was, felt sick with its violence. But Miss Kate O'Neill on the awning deck did elaborate calculations on

sheets of paper, which she tore up and threw into the beer-colored river when she had entered the results in her pocket-book; and down in the purser's room, Carter carved images on Okky calabashes for the English curiosity market.

To him came Mr. Balgarnie, dripping and fuming. "Great whiskers! man, why did you shut the port-hole? You're lean; but if I stay in this atmosphere I shall peg out of heat apoplexy in half an hour. Here, let me open the port and stick out the wind scoop."

"Wind scoop's no good; there isn't a breath. And if you open the port you'll be devoured. I tried it. I'm a Dalesman and I like a draught of air, but it's no go here. Red ants, I think they are. Look at the way they've been eating the insides out of your domestic cockroaches. Now gaze on this chop bowl? Isn't it a gem? Any stay-at-home Englishman would spot it as genuine native workmanship in a moment. All done with a blunt knife; that's the great tip in this sort of carving."

"Have a drop of whiskey? You fit for dash me dem bowl?"

"No, Purser, I'm not going to give away anything just now. I want five shillings spot cash for this specimen, and it's dirt cheap at that. When you've weathered it a bit, and given it a dressing of good yellow palm oil, it will fetch a golden sovereign from a Las Palmas tripper, easy."

"They're a hard-up lot, the people who come to the Islands these days, and they're inclined to get too familiar if you offer as a favor to sell them anything they may see in your room. I've chucked showing them things. But I might get three half-crowns for that bowl in Liverpool. Of course, I don't want any commission from you, old fellow. I'll hand over every penny I'm paid for it."

Carter stuck out a dogged chin. "Look here, Purser, it's too hot for frills, and we know one another a bit too well for them to go down. Potter out five bob and the thing's yours to make what you can of. If you don't, I've another customer who'll give more. I'm hard up."

"Oh, of course, yes. You want to set up housekeeping, don't you? Well, old fellow, here are the two half-crowns towards the mangle or the grand piano or whatever you've set your mind on getting first. Sorry I ragged you about being engaged to Laura last night at Smooth River. But, you see, I know Owe-it Slade, and I've known Laura all her life, and of course I was a bit surprised to be told, you know—well, to be told that you, of all people, had made it up with her. But, as I say, I'm sorry I ragged you."

"Please don't apologize on a hot day like this," Carter snapped. "As I don't value your opinion on a matter like that one jot, I naturally didn't let anything you said disturb my sleep. Good-afternoon. If you're going to occupy your room, I'll go out on deck and enjoy the infernal crushed-marigold stink of this drain from a different point."

"That young man knows he's made a fool of himself," commented the Purser sagely, "and he's as sore and uneasy as a skinned eel in a tub of sand. Well, if he wants to furnish a lil' log hut for his dusky Laura, so much the better for trade. He's the neatest trick of making native curios in all West Africa, and I've got all his home business in my hand. It's all rot about his trading with another purser; there isn't one on the Coast that works this line, or I should have heard about it. If the output's increased, I shall try and work up a connection with America. My Whiskers! why not? What's wrong with enriching the United States with some good broad-bladed Okky spears, and a war horn or two just as a— Hullo, yes, who's that? Ah, come in."

There was a knock at the Purser's door, and White-Man's-Trouble entered in reply to the invitation. "Oh, Purser," he said, "dem bug," and opened a black fist and showed three electric-blue butterflies in his white palm.

The Purser took them one by one in his plump fingers and dropped them gingerly into an empty cardboard cigarette box. "I don't think they'll be much use, boy. You've rubbed too much fluff off with those delicate paws of yours. Savvy?"

"I savvy I fit for dash," said the Krooboy pointedly.

"Pooh, these are worth nothing. What do you take me for? A tripper, or the Bank of England? Ah, would you, you infernal thieving monkey?" Mr. Balgarnie had turned his back and had glanced in a shaving mirror which hung by the port and saw White-Man's-Trouble helping himself to a Tauchnitz novel, which he promptly tucked underneath his coat.

The Krooboy put the book down. He did not waste time in apologizing for the theft of something that was entirely useless to him. He went straight to a matter of far graver interest.

"Oh, Purser, how you seen me take dem thing? You no see with you eyes. You eyes lib for look out of window."

"Attend," said Mr. Balgarnie, and struck an attitude. "I am the man known to science as the Freak-who-has-eyes-at-the-back-of-his-head. Observe, I have my back to you and yet I can see that you are picking your nose with your strong left hand, and scratching the floor with your starboard toe."

"I no fit for see you back eyes."

"That is because they are ju-ju eyes. Oh, White-Man's-Trouble, I bid you fear the Powers of Darkness and steal no more anything that is mine. You savvy?"

"Savvy plenty!"

"And as a further punishment, I bid you catch me ten more butterflies, and take care you don't rub the feathers off, or they'll be no use to Miss Kate."

"Missy Kate! What for she want dem bug? Dem no fit for chop."

"To make ju-ju of."

White-Man's-Trouble grinned. "Missy Kate no savvy ju-ju palaver. Dem Carter, he show her dem god with talk-pipe, an' she say, 'Well, dere no ju-ju about him.' Oh, Purser, I say dem god with talk-pipe plenty-too-much-fine ju-ju. Okky-men savvy plenty him ju-ju."

"Your theology's a bit above my head, but I don't mind telling you in confidence that butterfly collecting's the lady's habit, just the same as—let me see—just the same as stealing things that are no use to you is yours, and spear making's Mr. Carter's. Savvy?"

"Savvy some," said the Krooboy doubtfully. "Does Missy sell dem bugs to steamah pursers, an' come ashore an' say dem dam' greedy hounds?"

"If you've got that idea in your aboriginal mind," said Mr. Balgarnie with a yawn, "don't let me crowd it with anything nearer the truth. You bring Miss Kate plenty of butterflies without the pretty rubbed off, and presently she dash you a new top hat with a gold band to it."

"I no fit for take dash from Missy," said White-Man's-Trouble with dignity. "I bring her plenty-too-many bugs for nix. I fit for know my job."

The purser stared with tired eyes. "So you honor her with your respectful admiration, too, do you? I wish I could get her knack. There, clear out with you, and put the door on the hook. Take your dirty hands away from that tooth-brush, confound you, and get out. It's my time for siesta."

In the meanwhile Laura Slade had gone out on the bridge deck, had found a chair without a card on it, and had dragged it up alongside her friend. She waited patiently till one of the long calculations had been worked out and the result entered up in the pocket-book, and then, when the figures were torn small, she jumped up and took the scraps of paper from the other girl's hand.

"Please let me do something, Kate. At least I can throw them overboard for you."

Miss O'Neill laughed, and plied her palm leaf fan. "My dear girl, I'm most pleased to be tempted away from work. In school days, as you will remember, I was worse than you were at sums. I've had to grind at them since, but it's not made me love them any the more. Why can't I be a rich woman without working for it?"

"Do you want so very much to be rich?"

Kate turned to her friend and opened her eyes wide. They were brown eyes, and someone once described them as talkative. But people who knew her better were very conscious of the fact that Miss Kate O'Neill's eyes only expressed things when she willed that they should do so.

"Do I want to be rich? Well, of course. One can't have things or do things unless one has money. And if I don't get money, no one will for me; or, at least, I'd rather they wouldn't. Of course, you have got Mr. Carter to work for you, Laura; but I am sure, when you put it into cold words, you'd like him to make money, too. You don't want to live all your days on the Coast here, the pair of you. You look forward to going home, and having a house and a garden, and a motor car, and a man to drive it. And you'd like to have good servants and nice frocks. Yes, especially nice frocks."

"Like yours. Yes, I should like a nice frock like that one, Kate, if you won't mind my copying it."

remark to his employer, and not to his fiancée. "Do you mind going below? There are half a dozen big Okky war canoes round that point ahead there. I've been forrad there, and could see them quite plainly through the mangrove roots."

"Have you told the Captain?"

"No. I'll tell him next. But will you go below, or into one of these deck houses? They are probably covering us this minute, and it's pot-leg they fire, not bullets. Pot-leg spreads and can make ghastly wounds."

"I don't like running away."

"If you could do any good staying out in the open I wouldn't ask you to move. Laura, will you persuade Miss O'Neill to go into cover, as she won't take any notice of me?"

"Thank you," said Kate sharply, "but Laura need not interfere. I am accustomed to making up my own mind, Mr. Carter, without help from anyone. I am much obliged to you for your care, and as I can't be of any use at present, and as I have no insane wish to be shot, I shall certainly go into shelter."

"Very good," said Carter; "then I'll go and carry the news to old Image. It's a lucky thing I brought along that Winchester of Slade's. We shall keep them off all right."

It turned out that Captain Image already had tidings of the war canoes, and was red with wrath at the idea of any qualified black savages having the unmentionable impudence to make a something naval demonstration against a sacred Liverpool oil tank. His language was quite unprintable, but his disposition of the steamer's forces was remarkably sound. Tackles squeaked as a Krooboy gang hoisted the ladder which hung alongside. The boatswain loaded the two brass sig-

nal guns on the bridge deck with their usual noisy charge of blank, and rammed a three-pound parcel of four-inch cut nails down the muzzle of each on the top of the powder bags. The carpenter replaced the gangways which are always unshipped when steamers are in the rivers working cargo. And the winches chattered as they each hove up a ponderous palm oil puncheon to the top of a derrick, which was then swung outboard so that the puncheon could be let go by the run, and smash any canoe made of hands that happened to be underneath.

When these pious duties had been fulfilled, the crew lined out along each of the lower deck rails armed with spanners, firebars, handspikes, and in fact any other weapon which a modern steamer could provide, which in lusty hands might be called upon to break a human head.

On the upper bridge Captain Image oversaw the only two mates who were not down with fever as they directed and assisted these operations, and when all was ready he laid his own hands on the siren string and let loose a hoarse throaty blast of defiance across the creeks and the steamy forest.

"There, Carter, me lad," said he, "that's to show the blighters we're here and waiting. I'm glad you've brought that Winchester. It's the only gun in the ship since Owel Slade borrowed my Holland and forgot to bring it back. They tell me you're a nailing fine shot, too."

"Couldn't hit a haystack with anything except a scatter gun."

"Well," said Image dryly, "as I saw some of your patients spread about in the clearing outside Smooth River Factory, I shall believe just as much of that as I choose. It's not my affair to mention it, of course, but I do know that Miss Kate was very considerably struck by the way you kept those niggers off, and if you hadn't been engaged to Slade's girl——"

"Which I am, Captain. So, therefore, it's no use going into useless possibilities. By the way, isn't that stern wire slackening?"

"By Crumbs, me lad, you've got a quick eye. The tide's coming up underneath her, and she's slipping off. Here you, Mr. Third Mate, ring those engines to full astern, and try and keep it in your head that you'd be in your room now if I weren't short of officers."

With the lift of the yellow tide beneath her, the *M'poso* drew out from her muddy dock as a sword is pulled from its sheath, hung for a dozen minutes in mid-stream whilst the stern-warp and its anchor were got aboard, and then, gathering her boat and its crew up to davits, turned stubbornly up the river.

"I'll show these Okky blighters what trouble is," declared Captain Image, "if they try and stop me. I've had their old king in my chart house here with Swizzle-Stick Smith and the other traders a score of times, and if he didn't drink the ship dry, it was only because I wouldn't let him. And now in return for that hospitality he brings out his infernal war canoes. I only hope he's in one of them and comes alongside. I'll brain him with an oil puncheon if I get him in range."

But when they opened up the reach behind the point where the canoes had been seen, there was no offer of attack. There were three craft in view, fifty paddle-power dugouts all of them, crammed with men and weapons, fantastic with horrible ju-ju charms; but they hung on to the wire-like stems of the mangroves and remained so moored till the steamer drew past and began to dance them up and down upon its wash. A monkey-skin drum in each was beaten impressively by two drummers, but no weapons were levelled, and there was no threat of boarding.

"Faugh!" said Image, and spat. "Did you catch the

smell of those beauties when we had them abeam? Talk of a 'bus stable struck by lightning!"

"They aren't there just to take in the scenery," said Carter thoughtfully.

"An Okky-man is born to mischief even as the sparks fly upward. Look, they're casting off their shorefasts and getting under weigh down stream. No, by Crumbs, they're turning up stream after me. Well, of all the blighted cheek! Do you know what that means, Carter, me lad? They're going to follow us. They think they've got some ju-ju by which they can cut us off from the Coast. Ah, here's Miss Kate. Well, Miss, as I've you to think of as well as my ship, I shall turn presently and run back again for the bar. You see for yourself, I should think now, that it isn't healthy up this river, and all the cargo in Africa is no use to a man if he can't get it shipped when he comes to the beach where it's stored. If any one of the war canoes get in my way, I'll show you what those bushmen look like when they're swimming in yellow water, for as sure as the Lord made crocodiles, I'll ram their noisy dug-outs if I can. I'll teach them to thump their nasty smelling war drums at me."

"Poof, Captain, don't you try to take me in. I should like to hear anyone else suggesting that you couldn't take the *M'poso* to a spot where the *Frau Pobst* had made regular voyages."

Captain Image thrust forward his head and glared. "I can take this packet anywhere that blessed Dutchman's been, Miss."

"Of course you can. And when the *Frau Pobst's* captain has shipped cargo from a spot——"

"And given up going there, Miss, because it's too dangerous."

"Precisely. Well, as I couldn't insult you by calling you less than twice as brave as the German, that means

that no little trouble that's going on between here and Mokki will frighten you in the very least. Is that good argument?"

"Oh, go on, Miss. Twist me round your finger. I like it. Besides it isn't the first time I've played a neck-or-nothing game. But I'm hanged if I see that it's an amusement for a pretty young lady like you."

Captain Image was speaking in plain earnest, and he was a man who knew. Kate O'Neill was seized with a sudden qualm. Was she right to force on this risk? Would the Okky-men attack, or could they bring off the cargo successfully? Nobody but herself seemed to see a shadow of chance for success. And these others were all old Coasters against whom she was setting up her will.

But when she thought of giving way and turning back the cost of retreat promptly leaped up and faced her in plain figures. O'Neill and Craven were heavily involved, how heavily no one knew but old white-haired Crewdson and herself. The Mokki oil that she had bought so cheap would save them. Without it there would be bankruptcy, and, what she dreaded even more, the contemptuous finger of Liverpool pointed at the woman who had taken upon herself a man's responsibilities and broken down beneath them.

These thoughts dinned through her again and again, but outwardly her face smiled and her lips spoke lightly.

"Now, it is nice of you to give me a promise like that, Captain."

"Like what?"

"To say that you'll go on till my nerves give way. Well, let it be so. I promise to give you news of it the moment I'm frightened. Look, there's an omen for you to read to me. The Okky-men in that first war canoe are all standing up and waving their spears. What does that mean, I wonder?"

CHAPTER X

ENVOYS IN COUNCIL

"HALLO, Meredith, I heard rumors that there was a white man up in this part of the bush, but I never guessed it was you. I did think of sending on a runner to see, but somehow I didn't."

"No, you wouldn't," said the older man. "I never knew you make up your mind to anything unless it was decided for you. Now, look here, Slade, we're in lonely country here, and if I shoot you, you'll never be missed; and, by gad, shoot you I will unless you mend your memory."

"Poof! what does it matter? We're the only white men within two hundred miles, and the boys are out of earshot."

"A black boy can hear a lot farther than you think, and for that matter I've known trees in West Africa to have ears that understand English—at least that has been the only explanation one could find of the way things have leaked out. But we'll leave all that alone. I've given you to understand by what name I wish to be addressed."

"Well, you needn't be so short about it. I've always called you Smith down in the Coast factories. Of course I can't forget that I once knew you when you were——"

"Will you hold your slobbering tongue? If you can't, say so, and I'll stop it once and for always. I've told you my wish; to you or anyone else I'm Smith, or Swizzle-Stick Smith, which you like. I've no connection with anything that went before, and 'pon my soul, as you're

the only man now alive that knows it, I believe I'd be a lot safer if you were out of the way."

Slade turned his back petulantly. "Oh, do stop this wrangle. I'll call you Swizzle-Stick Smith to the end of the chapter, and forget that you were ever anything other than a drunken old palm-oil ruffian, if it pleases you. Come to my hut and chop. I shot some parrots this morning. They'll taste a bit like high rook, but they are better than tinned stuff anyway. They came over finely; real raketers. It was quite like the old days at home. This gun, by the way, is about my last link with ancestral splendor. Look there, a Holland. They wanted me to have ejectors, I remember, but I wouldn't."

Mr. Smith screwed his eyeglass into his other eye and straightened the new black silk ribbon by which it hung. "No," he said grimly, "that was very wise of you, especially as ejectors weren't invented when that gun was built. I wonder what sort of a tale you told Image before he trusted you with it?"

"What are you driving at? What's Cappie Image to do with it?"

"That's my gun. I had it—well, as you've started the forbidden subject already—I had it before the fall. Image saw it at Malla-Nulla one day when I was full up and walked off with it, and I never managed to get it back from him. He always said the beach was too bad to risk letting a surf boat bring it ashore. Well, you may keep the thing for the present, and I'll take a bowlful of your parrot stew by way of rent. This the house? You've managed to find yourself pretty comfortable quarters, I see."

The house was a series of rooms packed round an internal courtyard. The outer walls were of wattle, luted with mud thrown onto them in vigorous handfuls, and

left to bake hard in the sun. The roof was a pile of untidy thatch, the floor of hardened mud, and in the middle of the courtyard was an ineffective shade-tree scorched by the smoke of the cooking fires. Beyond this house sprawled the other houses of a small West African village, with the usual squalor heaped between them.

To most Europeans there would have been much to notice—the cooking vessels, the calabashes, the food, the ju-ju charms that one met at unexpected corners, the scavenging dogs, and the all-pervading smells. But Swizzle-Stick Smith's curiosity was worn by twenty years attrition, and these savage circumstances had grown native to him. He did not even comment on the fact that Slade was living entirely in local fashion, the thing was so obvious a course for his friend to follow that he took it for granted. He himself was a man of like tastes. Down at Malla-Nulla the menu had mostly smacked of Africa; but once he had left the Coast, Mr. Smith had travelled as an Okky headman travels, living mainly on kanki and couscousoo, and for beverage partaking of sour palm wine, muddy bush-water, and an allowance of trade gin sternly cut down to one square-faced bottle per diem.

His only comment on the place was that Slade's mosquito bar was made of a material that they had long ago decided was faulty, and that a certain mark of cheesecloth gave better passage to the air, and was more impervious to insects. To which Slade made reply that he knew it, but couldn't be bothered to change, after which the cookboy brought in a calabash of odorous, highly-peppered stew, colored bright orange with palm oil and condiments, and set it on the floor of one of the rooms. Mr. Smith pocketed his pipe, dropped his eyeglass to the end of its black ribbon, and wiped his hands on his shabby pyjamas, after which simple preparations the pair of

them sat down on the earth beside the calabash and proceeded to eat skilfully from their fingers.

Around them were the cases and bales of Slade's outfit, each done up into a "load" ready for a carrier's head. In the other room of the house and in the courtyard were the carriers, some of them eating, some of them cleaning their teeth with the rubbing stick, which all Coast natives use incessantly in moments of leisure, some of them chatting. Most of them sat bareheaded in the staring sunlight; a few nestled in the purple shadows. One was picking a jigger out of his toe with a splinter of bamboo. In a spare corner another played tom-tom on the bottom of an empty kerosene-tin bucket, and three stalwarts stood up before him monotonously dancing.

Mr. Smith finished his meal and took out his pipe. "Does it run to a peg?" he asked.

"It does. Don't spoil my fine vintage port with tobacco. You can smoke afterwards. Here, boy, we fit for gin."

"Gin lib," said the Accra in attendance, and handed a square-faced bottle and a bowl.

"Good. Now, when you see dem Smith fit for smoke, you bring fire, one-time. Savvy?"

"I fit."

Swizzle-Stick Smith moved back until his shoulders rested against a bale, and hitched up the knees of his shrunk pyjamas and stretched his arms pleasantly. "You travel in comfort, Slade."

"The secret is, I don't move along too fast. I've been in this village a fortnight. I don't know when I shall make up my mind to pull out and go on."

"Not till you've eaten it bare or are forced off some other way, I suppose. You're a curious envoy for a confiding employer in Liverpool to send out into the bush."

Slade grinned. "Old Godfrey wouldn't have done it. But this new K. O'Neill hasn't seen my cutaway chin. K.'s a hustler, but he's young, remarkably young."

"Have you done anything in the way of getting him a rubber property?"

"Well, curiously enough I have. At least, I've bought him up a few square miles of country that rubber vines would grow on well enough if it was cleared, and planted, and tended, and no one put ju-ju on them."

"Is it get-at-able?"

"It's on some river or other. The ditch isn't marked on the map, but I daresay a steamer could get up if it was worth while. The title's as good as one could expect."

"That means it won't be jumped so long as you pay fifty pounds a year to the next claimant."

"I should say five-and-twenty will fix him," said Slade lazily. "You see he's headman of the next village and he thinks he's got some unproductive bush to sell himself. I've rammed into his skull the great truth that his deal can't go through if he starts trying to jump his neighbor's land and unsteadies the market. I think those considerations will outweigh even his nigger's love for litigation—" He went on to give listlessly enough a few more details of the transaction.

Mr. Smith was well-versed in the ways of West African diplomacy, and could appreciate to a nicety all the haggling and the patience and the tedious arguments that had gone to build up these complicated bargains. He screwed in his eyeglass and looked at Slade attentively. "I wonder," he said, "why you always make yourself out to be such an infernal waster? You know you must have been doing some thundering good work. I couldn't have put that deal through, and I know my West Africa as well as you do or better. There's not one man in five thousand could have managed it. What's your trick?"

"Oh, I found myself in comfortable quarters, and I couldn't make up my mind to move on and try more likely country elsewhere. So I stayed and talked rubber-palaver with the headman. One had to do something for amusement. Besides they'd a tree of alligator pears in the village that were exactly ripe, and it would have been a crime to leave them to benighted Africans. By the way, very rude of me not to ask before, but what have you done since you left the Coast?"

"Got into a very ugly hole," said Swizzle-Stick Smith shortly, "and wriggled out of it by the skin of my teeth."

"Rubber-palaver?"

"No."

"Oh, sorry for inquiring. I thought that was what you came up for?"

"So it was, and I started off from the Coast with a full intention of carrying out O'Neill and Craven's business. But I got led off on an old trail."

"Ah," said Slade thoughtfully. "I believe I could guess."

"Guessing's dangerous. But I may as well own up to you frankly that I've been seeing the King of Okky."

"Well, you've a nerve. I shouldn't have cared for that job myself."

"It wasn't pleasant. Okky City jars one's sense of decency rather badly just now. Old Kallee's been going it extra strong on human sacrifices, you know. His private crucifixion tree is a thing you don't like to think about."

"Filthy old beast he is."

"But he's the strongest man hereabouts."

"I see. And you got onto your old game of the pre-Smith days and tried to get him to put the Okky country and his royal self under the formal protectorate of the

British Empire? I thought you dropped all that tommyrot when you got kicked—I mean when you turned trader and became known to fame as Mr. Smith. Sink the past, of course, sink the past, but you started it.”

“I couldn’t help going. I got news of a French expedition in Okky City. Of course I’ve been damnably treated by the British Foreign Office in days gone by, but the old fires will relight sometimes. Frenchmen in Okky City, I’ll trouble you, Slade, and of course with the usual accompaniment. *Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*. So I couldn’t resist trying my own hand with the Kallee, even though I hadn’t anything at all up to his weight as an introductory dash.”

“Half a dozen cases of Heidsieck is the nearest way to his royal ear, though I hear that lately he’s developed a taste for the better years of Krug.”

“That’s quite true. It was a fancy touch of Burgoyne, our Monk River man. I call that hardly legitimate business, you know. German champagne and angostura are good enough for me, and they ought to be good enough for a black savage like Kallee. Dash it, what right’s he to a palate?”

“Would he see you?”

“Well, of course I’ve known him since before he killed his predecessor and got the King’s stool, and so he’s a bit freer with me than he is with most people.”

Slade nodded. “And you drank together till you were both blind speechless?”

“I wasn’t, anyway,” said the older man shortly. “I kept my head and stuck to my tale. The Frenchman wasn’t in it. He went to sleep before we whacked the first ten bottles, and he was laid up with a fine dose of fever next day; but there was no shifting Kallee. He doesn’t care an escribello for all the might, majesty, do-

minion and power of the British Empire. He's got ten small cannon up there, that, according to him, can quite account for Great Britain if it comes to worry him, and in the meanwhile the French are very kind friends. They've given him a gramophone, and a general's uniform, and an ice-making machine, and when they bring him the canoe load of Winchester repeaters he's asked for, he'll sign a treaty of allegiance to France."

"Arms of precision! The Frenchman had better take care. If any of our Government fellows catch him at that game, they'll shoot him first and inquire into him afterwards."

"Well, what he's going to do in the matter, I don't exactly know. You see, the beggar had Kallee's ear, and to tell you the plain truth he had me deported. Kallee said that if he laid hands on me again, he would have my skin off, and stuff it with straw, and stick it in the road that leads to Malla-Nulla as a warning to the next Englishman that came along that it would be more healthy to keep inside his own marches."

Slade laughed. "I bet you footed it away."

"What the devil else could I do? And here am I, no forwarder with O'Neill and Craven's job than I was the day I tramped out of Malla-Nulla. I did say 'Rubber' to the King, and he did hear out my tale. He said it was good palaver, and set on a couple of hundred slaves there and then with matchets to clear bush and plant rubber vines to grow revenue for himself. But he sells no land to Englishmen, and I guess if another of the breed comes up yet awhile, Kallee'll plant him. By the way, Slade, have you been in touch with the bush telegraph?"

"Oh, I heard that the usual vague rows and horrors were going on in Okky City, but I didn't pay much attention to that. I did hear, too, that Cappie Image and the

M'poso helped a red-headed man, who I suppose was that young Carter of yours, in some sort of a row at presumably Malla-Nulla. I took the trouble to go into the dates; the news must have travelled here in thirty hours, and we're a good two hundred miles from the Coast. It is a bit marvellous. I wonder how the deuce the niggers do it. Some sort of ju-ju, I suppose, but I never met a white man yet who understood the trick."

"Did you hear anything about a white woman stirring things up?"

"Certainly, I did, and concluded it was Laura. I left her in charge at Smooth River, you know, and she's grown into a jolly capable girl, let me tell you, old man, when she cares to spread herself. What are you twiddling about your eyeglass for? Why don't you say out what you mean? Oh, I see. White. By gad, I'd never thought of that. Even a bush telegraph, which is always liable to mistake in detail, would never blunder into calling my little girl white. By gad, Smith, what a damnable thing that 'sins of the fathers' law is. If I were a man that ever looked so much as half a day ahead, I believe I should go mad at the thought of what will become of Laura in the future. You're a tough old ruffian with no cares and you could never understand what that kiddie is to me."

"No use crying over a marriage that's over. Everybody that knows her will do his best for Laura, and if any man tried hanky-panky tricks with her he'd probably die one of the local deaths of Africa in very quick time. But about this white woman. I heard about her, too. There was a big tom-toming far away in the bush one night, ten minutes after the sun went out, and my boys listened hard and then set up a fine chatter. It was long enough before I could make anything out of them, but at last I heard something about 'a white mammy' that

set me thinking. I got the idea at first that someone, probably the Okky-men, had been knocking a she-missionary on the head, and that made me cock up my ears. You know when a trader or a man in one of the services gets scuppered out here, the pious people at home say it's his own brutal fault and the poor African is quite right in what he does. But when it's a missionary, the Exeter Hall crew insist on war."

Slade put up the usual Coaster's wish for the future of Exeter Hall.

"Quite so," said Swizzle-Stick Smith. He got up and limped across to the doorway and stood there for a minute puffing pale blue smoke into the dazzle of sunshine. Then he came back again and once more sat on the earthen floor with his back against a bale. "The boys out there, both yours and mine, are still harping on the same subject."

"I didn't make out that the white woman was killed."

"Nor did I, when I went into the matter further. I was only explaining what gave me the first interest in the subject, because if there had been a she-missionary killed, all the bush would know that meant war, and they would slaughter every white man they came across out of sheer light-heartedness. No, if that had happened, you would not have seen me here. I should have lit out for the Coast, one-time. But I presently found that the white woman had not been killed, but that she was a someone who seemed to puzzle my boys exceedingly. There seemed to be heap-too-much ju-ju about her. She did things no one else could tackle."

"Sort of champion lady weight-lifter? Boy, fill Mr. Smith's pipe and bring him fire."

"You know that Kroo word, Oomsha, that means Sultana or woman-above-a-headman, or something like that?"

"I heard a tale of an Oomsha once somewhere up Sokoto way. She's been head wife of an Emir, and when he died she killed all the heirs and ran the town herself. I thought it meant more witch or conjurer. It's a ju-ju word."

"Well, I won't quarrel with you over etymology, and we seem to agree enough on the definition for practical purposes. Now, my boys said that this white woman was an Oomsha. Did you hear that?"

"Not I. I tell you I thought it was Laura they were gassing about, and I didn't trouble myself to inquire more deeply."

"Dash it," said the old man fiercely, "do rouse up and interest yourself in something. What the deuce has a white sultana got to do messing around the Coast factories, especially O'Neill and Craven's? And let me tell that's what's happening."

"Is the mythical lady setting everybody by the ears and preparing for a holy something?"

"That's the maddening part of it. They all seem to like her. She's stirring up everybody, she's upsetting your factory and mine, she's dragged the man with the red head in adoration to her feet and then spurned him from her, and she's even captured the warm and profane Cappie Image as one of her servitors."

"Poof! blarney old Image! Now, that proves you've got onto a fairy tale."

Mr. Smith thumped an emphatic fist on the hard stamped floor beside him. "I tell you I have not. The bush telegraph never lies. You may misunderstand it, but if you take time and trouble, and dig deep enough, you'll always come to the truth of things. As sure as we are sweating in this bush village here, there's a white woman on the Coast turning all the business there upside down."

"I've got it," said Slade. K. O'Neill's tired of having all his bright ideas comfortably shelved by you and me, and so his new happy thought is to send his fascinating typewriter out to hand instructions over in person, and wait till they're put through. Your Carter and my Laura would be just the sort of enthusiastic young people to fall in with a scheme like that. But I must say the conquest of Image beats me. It would take a heap more than a hen typewriter to tame Cappie Image-me-lad."

"Yes, I thought of all that, but there's one blessed thing that upsets it completely. The Oomsha is making headquarters at the Dutch factory at Mokki, and building a fort there. Now, play on that."

"Weather too hot," said Slade. "Whe-ew! I wish the breeze would come."

"Dash it, man, think! A white woman building a fort up at Mokki."

"Sounds buccaneerish, or I'll tell you what, German." Slade sat up with a sudden spurt of unaccustomed energy and ran the perspiration off his face with a forefinger. "By gad! I didn't think of that, but picture the joys of having a beastly German in at the back of us, with a Government subsidy, and a price-cutting apparatus all complete."

"Yes," said Swizzle-Stick Smith grimly, "and also picture to yourself the eminently British Captain Image yielding to the soft blandishments of a German Frau. He'd as soon think of making himself amiable to a gorilla. No, that theory's wrong. The thing stumps me, and I'm sure if it's too big for me, it's outside your size."

"Quite so," said Slade, who had dropped back into his normal slackness after the spurt of energy. Then he screwed up his eyes tightly as the hot air was split with a succession of piercing yells and screeches.

"Good Lord, what's that?" the old man called out.

"Some poor brute of a farmer, who's been working on his cassava ground, being pulled down by a leopard. There, don't get up; you can't do anything. Don't you hear he's quiet now, which means 'palaver set' as far as the farmer is concerned. That will make the rest of his agricultural neighbors careful for the next twenty-four hours, and go to their work in pairs, and take their spears. At the end of twenty-four hours their massive memories will fail them and they'll stroll out alone just as the spirit moves them, and someone else will be chopped. Those squeals used to make one feel rather sick at first, and one was apt to get excited and rush out with a gun. But it never did any good. Spotted Dick always prefers to dine in privacy and drags his mutton back into the bush. I can imagine," Slade added with a faint laugh, "that an energetic man who was a bit of a sportsman would find this place pretty exasperating. Thanks to these careless animals of villagers ground-baiting the creatures to the extent they have done, there's the best stocked leopard-cover in Africa round here, but you simply can't get them up to the gun. I've tried sitting up for them over a kill, I've tried stalking, and always got nothing. I risked a drive one day and the leopard chopped a couple of beaters. It would be exasperating to an energetic man, but thank goodness I'm not that, and so I've simply taken things as they came."

"H'm," said Smith thoughtfully. "When we walked in here I noticed I limped on one side and you limped on the other. We sort of jabbed at one another, in and out. Now, limping is a new accomplishment for you. Have you been interviewing a leopard personally?"

Slade's sallow face flushed a little. "Well, you see, a son of the headman here took it into his silly head to get

in a leopard's way one day, and I knew the old chap was awfully fond of the lad. So I just retrieved him, and we both got a bit clawed in the process. But it was purely a matter of business for K. O'Neill. The old goat of a headman wouldn't listen to any suggestion for buying rubber lands before. Dash it all, Smith, I am slack, I know, but I do try and put in a bit of work for the firm in return for my pay sometimes."

CHAPTER XI

AGAIN PRESENTS THE HEAD OF THE FIRM

"FIRE's the only thing we have to be frightened of for the present," said Carter, "and this soft, soggy wet timber of which the fort is built wouldn't burn without a lot of persuasion. Still, all the same I wish I could think of something that would make it absolutely fireproof."

"The ancients," said Miss O'Neill, "used to cover their works with raw bull's hide to ward off fire arrows. That wise remark comes from some school-book, but I've forgotten where. Laura can quote?"

"No," said Laura shortly.

"Not having bulls," said Carter, "we can't have their hide, but I'll just let word ooze out that if the Okky-men attack, we'll skin those we bag and nail up their pelts——"

"Mr. Carter!"

"Well, I beg your pardon for being horrible, but I tell you frankly that if I thought for a moment that a message like that would be believed, I'd send it in a moment. You know, Miss Head, we're in an uncommon tight place, and as acting commander-in-chief, I tell you flatly it will be a case of 'all-in' if it comes to a scrap."

"Oh, Missy, dem Carter mean he fit for use ju-ju besides guns," White-Man's-Trouble explained.

"It couldn't have been put more neatly. We must call in even the powers of darkness, as far as they'll answer to a whistle, if it comes to open fighting. But in the meanwhile, as some solemn idiot said in a text-book, 'prepared-

ness for war is the best insurance for peace,' and I ask you to observe this tramway which the boys have laid down during the night. Trouble here was ganger, and I've only had to bang him for letting the guage spread in two places."

"Is it to show sightseers quickly round the works?" Kate asked.

"No, madam. I shall mount on trucks those two tin-pot brass muzzle-loading signal guns that you bamboozled out of old Image, have embrasures (if that's the word for holes to shoot through) at all the corners, and I can rush those guns round to fire at all points of the compass at a pace that will surprise friend Kwaka, if he is in command of the enemy. I am pleased to say Kwaka looks for the supernatural when he is dealing with me, and I make a point of conscience in seeing that he gets it. I found some sheets of yellow tissue-paper in the feteesh here, all mottled with black mildew, and they gave me an idea. I cut out a leopard and pasted him together, and left a hole in him underneath, and fitted that with a wire carrier and a cotton wool burner that will hold spirit."

"What, a fire balloon?"

"Just that. With a dose of trade gin on the cotton wool, and a match and a little careful manipulation, we'll have a portent sailing up into the sky that will astonish the Okky-men's weak nerves in most disastrous style."

"You are really a most ingenious person," said Miss O'Neill. "Isn't he, Laura?"

"I suppose so," said Laura.

"It's that blessed Cascaes that's the weak spot in the defence. I suppose I've the usual West Coast prejudice against Portuguese; you know even the natives divide creation up into white men, black men, and Portuguese, and the particular specimen we've taken over here with the factory just bristles with bad points."

"I think he's rather nice," said Laura. "You were fighting with him this morning and I hated to see it."

"Well," said Carter, judicially, "I shouldn't define it as fighting exactly, but I'll admit, if you like, that I was kicking him. You see, Miss Head here has given most strict orders that not more than six strangers were ever to be admitted into the fort together at one time. He'd fourteen actually in the feteesh. Now, supposing those gallant fourteen suddenly produced weapons and held the gate whilst friends they'd ambushed outside ran across the clearing and rushed us, where'd we be?"

"Oh," said Laura, "I'm sorry I interfered if it was Kate's orders you were carrying out."

"So, Miss Head, with your permission I'll run up a chimbeque for the fellow outside the walls."

"Where did you get that word chimbeque from?" Kate asked. "It's Fiote, not Oil Rivers talk."

Carter's brown eyes twinkled. "I say, what a marvel you are to know things! I bet Laura didn't spot that. Why did I use the word? Well, we had a Portuguese linguister down at Malla-Nulla who had worked in the Congo, and he imported that and a lot more Congolese words as part of his baggage, and we absorbed them. Observe now. Trouble! I say, Trouble, come in here, and keep away from that sugar bowl in case you are tempted. Just stand there by the door. Now, tell me. You fit for savvy what a chimbeque is?"

The Krooboy's flat nose perceptibly lifted with contempt. "Dem bushman's word for hut. I fit for learn English on steamah. You can tell Missy I once was stand-by-at-crane boy on black funnel boat. I no say chimbeque; I say 'house.'"

"You fairly overflow with education at times. There, run away outside, and play again. So you see, Miss Head,

if Cascaes runs a sort of extra feteesh away out in the clearing, he can't land us into much danger however careless and indiscreet he may be. Of course it will entail a little extra labor below in handling both produce and trade goods, but now we've got the fort practically built, I've a lot more boys I can set free for the ordinary work. Which reminds me that I forgot to ask if this new boy you've got for butterfly hunter is any better than the last?"

"I'm afraid he isn't much. He doesn't tear the net all to bits, but he's rubbed every specimen fatally before he pinned it into the collecting box."

"I was afraid there was friction. I saw White-Man's-Trouble call up that boy and look into the collecting box when he thought I was safely siestaing. They had a little excited conversation, and then Trouble grabbed him by a handful of wool and lammed into him with a chiquot."

"Ugh," said Kate, "it is very flattering to have Trouble's kind approval, but I do wish there was not such a local popularity for the methods of—what shall I say?"

"Primitive man. They rather grow on one. Perhaps I'm prejudiced in their favor, though. Even when I was at school I always preferred a licking to an imposition. By the way, you never showed me the butterflies you've collected here since you took them out of splints and pinned them in their case."

"Then come at once and admire," said Kate, and the pair of them left the veranda and went into the factory's living room.

Laura Slade looked after them wistfully. There was something between these two that she could not fathom, and vaguely feared. At Smooth River, and on the *M'poso*, their talk had been on the chilliest details of business, and only the most bare civilities passed beyond. It had

seemed to her then that at any moment a word might bring a permanent rupture, and she had pleaded with each to accept the other in a more reasonable spirit. She was engaged to Carter; he kept reminding her of the tie in twenty different ways each day. She had lived under the ægis of the O'Neill and Craven firm all her life, and exaggerated its importance, and she begged Carter not to throw away what was his livelihood now and what would be hers when she married him.

Kate, too, was her friend, and together they had been the closest of confidants. She had known the secret of the firm's "Mr. K. O'Neill" almost as long as old Crewdson had known it, and she had kept that secret loyally in spite of the keenest temptation.

"Kate, I even kept it from George," she had said, and Kate had replied, "George being Mr. Carter, I suppose?"

Up to the time that they left the *M'poso*, it seemed hopeless to bring them even into the most stiff agreement. And then the first morning she woke up at Mokki, there was Kate in a Madeira chair on the veranda, with George Carter sitting on the rail beside her, and the pair of them were laughing and chatting as easily as though they had known one another a year.

She had never got what she thought any satisfactory explanation of how this relief of the tension had been brought about. She asked Carter, and he said he had arrived at the conclusion he had "merely been a rude ass," and it was time to be ashamed of himself and try ordinary human civility. She had attempted to sound Kate, and was merely congratulated on being engaged to a really nice man. And thereafter she had watched an intimacy grow between them, in which somehow or other, in spite of their obviously labored efforts to include her, she had no part.

She turned away from the door now, and sat down in one of the veranda chairs which the thrifty German had made for himself out of a palm-oil puncheon. Behind her the white man and the white woman talked butterflies. Before her was Africa, and night. No moon had risen, a few of the stars were lit. Fireflies blinked in and out at unexpected places in the velvety blackness, uncannily vanishing when their spasm of light was over. The night breeze sang gently through the trees and gave sharpness to the air, and the drone of insects kept to one low insistent note like the distant murmur of the river. The factory boys, tired with their merciless work, slept. But from the bush beyond the clearing there came ever and again a groan, or a roar, or a shriek, as often as not dimmed to a mere murmur by distance, to keep her aware of the axiom that Africa never sleeps and always carries pain.

The land breeze blew strong and her dress was thin. She shivered a little and called for Carter, as he had taught her, to bring a wrap. He came running out with it at once and covered her shoulders, as she was pleased to think, tenderly. He even stopped and talked to her for a minute or so. Then he said he must go and see Miss Head's last case, and once more went into the living room. She strained her ears to listen, and she heard the butterfly talk begin again where it had broken off.

They had an alarm that night that the Okky-men were coming. Into the blank silence of sleep there came the roar of a heavy charge of black trade powder as a sentry discharged his dew-filled flintlock. The whites, the Portuguese, and the tired factory boys roused into instant wakefulness. Their nerves were too nicely set to need a second shaking.

Laura met Carter in pyjamas as he was in the act of thumping upon her bedroom door. "Oh, you have got

up," he said. "That's good. Well, don't show a light whilst you dress, and keep under shelter. I must just wake Miss O'Neill before I go down."

She put her arms round his neck and pulled him to her and kissed him violently. "You came for me first then, after all?"

"You little goose, of course I did. Wives first, employers next. Here, I must go, or the battle will be over before I'm down. The odds are those heroes are blazing away at nothing."

They were. Each black man as he came up to the palisade poked the muzzle of his gun through a loophole, pulled trigger, and drew comfort from the din. Presently Carter came up to the breastwork, climbed to the banquette, and leaned over, and then peered long and hard through the night. He could see nothing. He got down, and with trouble found the sentry who had fired first. When he had thumped the man into calmness, it turned out that he had seen nothing also. He had "thought ju-ju" and then his gun "lib for shoot by himself." Or in plainer English, the man had dozed with his hand round his gun lock to keep the damp from the priming; he had been struck by a nightmare and had pulled the trigger. He had aimed at nothing. His gun muzzle had been upright, and he "lib for shoot dem moon."

Cascaes, the Portuguese, came up with a Winchester under his arm in time to hear the end of this explanation. "The negro like-a some noise, eh, senhor?"

"What about yourself?" asked Carter uncivilly. "Haven't you been joining in? I suppose you're first cousin to these fellows, anyway."

Cascaes put a little finger down the muzzle of his rifle, wiped it round, lit a match, and showed that the finger was clean.

"Oh, I beg pardon," said Carter. "I thought you were likely to share in the local revels."

"Well," said the Portuguese thoughtfully, "I suppose I must count that an apology. Otherwise I should have shot you. Good-night, senhor."

Carter waited till the man turned, ran in quickly, and plucked away his rifle. "And now," said he, "just let us understand one another exactly before we go any further. I'm standing quite all the risks from outside that I've any use for just at present. If there's any shooting to be done amongst ourselves, I prefer to do it myself. So first of all let's hear your trouble."

"In the first-a place I am not negro. I am European of blood-a as pure as your own, an' far-a-more ancient."

"If the apology I gave you just now doesn't cover that, I'll apologize some more for calling you a nigger. Furthermore, I didn't know that you claimed to be a gentleman, not that gentility is any excuse for not carrying out one's job here on the Coast."

"Senhor, you are handsome. And I agree with you that here in Africa we are all-a workmen, and must suffer if the work-a is not well done."

"Well," said Carter impatiently, "is that the lot? To my simple British mind your reasons for wanting to shoot me seem pretty thin so far. I suppose you are mad at my basting you this morning, but if you think the circumstances out coolly, I'm sure you'll see that we've women's lives to think of here as well as our own, and by letting the niggers you were overseeing scamp their work whilst you were dreaming over a cigarette, you were risking the safety of the fort."

"Senhor, do you know of what-a I was dreaming?"

"Private affairs probably, but anyway of something immaterial."

"Pardon, but I must tell-a you my dreaming. It was of a woman's life I dreamed."

Carter laughed shortly. "I think you had better leave it at that. It sticks in my mind that the three Portuguese ladies in this factory at Mokki are all officially protected by their lawful husbands, and I don't want to hear any embarrassing confidences."

"And may not a Portuguese gentleman, poor-a I grant you, but still of good blood, give-a his affection to a lady of another race?"

A moon had lit up in the sky above, and under it Carter's jaw looked of a sudden more square and grim than usual—at least the other thought so. His tone, too, changed from banter to something hard. "I decline to hear another word on the matter. We will confine our dealings with one another entirely to details of business, if you please, Cascaes, and leave matters of sentiment alone. Here is your gun. You say you are a gentleman, and I believe you. That means you won't shoot me from behind, or when I'm not armed equally with yourself. If the necessity arrives for a turn-up on level terms, I'm your man. Good-night."

And so for that night they parted, each very much misunderstanding the other. Once more the tired sentries yawned at their posts, and the Europeans of the factory retired to their beds, and the blacks to their sleeping mats; but sleep for the rest of that hot, damp night was broken, and no half-hour passed without a cry from some dreamer which woke restless echoes from his neighbors.

But with daylight the steady stream of merchandise, which the factory was beginning to attract, recommenced. The native traders of the hinterland had their hands full of the stock that had been pouring in upon them ever since the King of Okky had closed the roads to the old Coast factories with which they were accustomed to deal,

and when the news spread, as it does spread in that mysterious West Africa, that the white woman of Mokki bought and sold in spite of the King's teeth, they were only too ready to back her with their custom. The merchants of that unknown back country are some of the keenest traders on earth.

Some came in single canoes through the gloom and odors of uncharted muddy creeks, trusting to secrecy for safe passage; others joined forces, and brought armed flotillas of great sixty-man-power dugouts down the main stream; others clubbed together into caravans, so strong and so well-defended that even Kallee's truculent raiders dared not cross the Okky marches to hold them up. So marvellously accurate were the rumors that had spread up country, that few of these keen merchants came into Mokki without a grass basket full of spoiled specimens of butterfly as a "dash" to propitiate the new trading power.

Every day the influx of merchants increased, till at last more came than the staff of the factory could deal with, and they camped outside the fort awaiting their turn to trade. Actually, a small native food market grew there to supply them. Kate had lowered the price the factory paid for every commodity, but still the bush merchants sold, and were only too glad of the chance. Times they felt were troublous; the shadow of the King of Okky hung over the steaming forests, and they wished to get what they could in European produce and be gone. At the Malla-Nulla, the Monk, or the Smooth River factories they would not have taken such prices; but the King of Okky had closed the roads to these, and for business purposes they were extinct. Nor would they have sold at such rates to the Germans when they held Mokki. Keen business man though he may be, the West African merchant is a creature of whim; the German he defines as a "bush-Englishman," which is a term of reproach; he distrusts both him

and his goods; and he will not trade with a German factory on anything like the same terms he will accept from the Briton, even though the Briton sell him German-made goods.

"We are doing such a tremendous business," said Carter one day at the evening meal, "that presently we shall strangle ourselves. We have used up all our own trade stuff, and we have stripped the Smooth River factory and Malla-Nulla, and pretty well emptied Burgoyne at Monk River. I don't know how finances are?"

"Tight," said Kate.

"And yet we've got at the very least £8,500 in kernels, palm oil, and high-grade rubber lying idle here. Moreover, we've tapped an unexpected vein of ivory. I thought at first that it was some small king's state reserve, some hoard he'd got buried, under the bed of a stream perhaps, which he wanted to realize on, and which would soon come to an end. But it's not that, it's new stuff that's been hunted within the last three years, and it's been diverted, I really believe, from the Congo market. It's a splendid line for us, but it will pinch out very promptly if we once stop buying. I verily believe these natives can telegraph a piece of commercial news half-way across Africa in the inside of a week."

"We are doing splendid business.

"Of course, we've got the firm's Miss K. O'Neill here on the spot, and hence the prosperity; but I wish we'd got our Miss K. for just half a day at the Liverpool end to diagnose that we're starving for a steamer. The fact is, that greedy old scoundrel Cappie Image-me-lad looks upon Mokki as his special private preserve, and he doesn't intend to see any of the other skippers picking up his cargo commission if he can avoid it."

"Do you blame him?" said Kate. "I don't. But at the same time I'm afraid Mokki factory can't wait each

time till Captain Image brings the *M'poso* on her round trips from Liverpool. However, I sent a canoe off this morning with a long cable which may ease matters."

"You sent off a canoe? I don't know how I shall get on without her crew."

"Oh, I remembered how shorthanded you are, Mr. Manager, but I've not piled more work onto you this time. You recollect that tall Haûsa merchant with the one eye who has been here for the last two days?"

"Yes, Rotata."

"I gave him the cable, and an order on Mr. Burgoyne for £15, to be paid on delivery. Will you O.K. the account?"

"I guess," said Carter shortly, "that you are boss. But if you'd told me you wanted to send a cable, I could have arranged it for you."

Kate looked at him steadily. "Why do you object to my working for myself, Mr. Carter?"

"Because I prefer to work for you. I'd work myself to the bone for you, if you'd let me."

"Why should you?"

"Because I—well, it's natural enough, isn't it? If you come to think of it, I am your paid employee."

Kate still looked at him with a steady eye. "Of course it is Laura that you are really working for."

Carter cleared his throat. "Of course," he said. "Well, if you and Laura will excuse me, I'll go into the other room now and post up my books." He got up and walked towards the mess-room door.

Cascaes, who had been sitting at the other end of the table with the Portuguese and their wives, got up, and went towards the vacant place. But Carter turned at the door and called him sharply. "I'm sorry to interrupt further," he said, "but I want your valuable assistance, Mr. Cascaes. So come along with me now."

CHAPTER XII

EXHIBITS ANTISEPTICS

THE night was hot, and steamy, and still. Even the insect hum was pitched on a drowsy note. The darkness seemed almost fat in its greasy heaviness. Two of the sweating factory boys were playing tom-tom on upturned kerosene cans, and a third was throwing in an erratic obligato with two pieces of scrap iron for an instrument. And from the river behind a pair of crocodiles made unpleasant noises with irritating persistency. Carter thought, too, that above the decay smell of the factory rubber store, the stable smell of the Krooboys, the crushed-marigold smell of the river, he could also catch the musky odor of the crocodiles, and felt vaguely sickened thereby.

“ . . . Those last-a bags of kernels I have not got-a weighed, senhor. I was weary, and so I go-a to change and shave for dinner.”

“ Why don’t you shave in the morning, instead of carrying a chin like a besom all through the day? I suppose, as usual, you were going to weigh up those kernels to-morrow? ”

“ You are most indulgent, senhor.”

“ I am nothing of the kind. Sufficient for the day is the work thereof, and the man that puts it off till to-morrow gets out of here. Like to hand in your resignation? ”

“ No, senhor, no.”

“ Then go and weigh those kernels, one-time. Then

come back here and make up your books. D'ye think I'm going to have my whole machinery of commerce held up because you want to go and shave, and oil your head, and put on clean whites and a crimson belly-band and otherwise make yourself fetching for the benefit of Miss O'Neill?"

"Miss-a O'Neill?" said the Portuguese in surprise. "I do not care a banana-skin——"

"Here, don't try and fill me up," said Carter bluntly. "And don't put on time. Take a lamp and go out and weigh those kernels, and see you don't set the shed on fire, and when you're through, and have posted your books, come out and fetch me. I'm going to smoke a cigar out in the open."

"The dew-a is heavy. There is fever about."

"Take your advice to the devil."

"Which fever," said Cascaes, "I should have added, if you had-a not interrupted me—which fever I hope you will get."

"That's all right. I like you dagos better when you spit venom openly. Now, you hurry up and go through those kernels, and see you get the weights right."

The dew was thick on the grass in the clearing and stood in sleek greasy drops on all the patches of bare stamped earth. Moon and stars were all eclipsed. Even the fireflies, although the dark would have given full value to their manœuvres, were absent. The unhealthy phosphorence of rotting dead wood here and there was the only illumination, except here and there a glow from a window in the factory.

Carter went out through a gate of the fort and walked up and down with restless energy. He was wet to the knees with dew; the damp Canary cigar between his teeth had long since gone out; but he cared for no small

things like these. He kept repeating to himself that "a man must play the game." "A man must play the game."

And presently, when the tom-toms and the jangling iron suggested some tune to his ear, he changed this to a jangle which stated "I could—not love—thee dear—so much—loved I—not hon—or more." And as the tune beat out into the hot steamy night, so did the words keep time to them with irritating repetition.

Once he stopped and shook a fist at the invisible sky above. "I am going to marry Laura," he declared, "if she was ten times as black. I am going to marry her though I know my father will never speak to me again, and I can't take her home. I am going to marry her though the heaven's fall. I am going to marry her for one reason that can't be got over, and that is because I said I would. A man must play the game. But my God! why did I never guess that Kate was on earth somewhere?"

There was an old cotton-wood stump in the clearing, and he stood against it so thoughtful and still that he became the object of attention of bats. He hit at them angrily and recommenced his prowl.

Hour after hour he tramped through the dripping grass, biting against fate. Cascaes, who did not work unless he was driven, had long since checked his tally of kernels, and gone to bed. The factory lamps had one by one gone out. The night noises of the forest that hemmed them in were in full swing. His thin clothes were sodden with the damp, and by every law of Africa he was gathering unto himself the seeds of disease. But still he tramped on, in and out amongst the huts and litter, wrestling with his misery.

The thing which in the end lifted him out of this unhealthy pit of self-pity was commonplace enough in its

way. As he was passing a small rude shelter of boughs and thatch, there came to his ears a very unmistakable human groan.

It was a temporary hut run up by some trader who was waiting his turn to do business at the factory, and the groan was of that timbre which told that it was wrenched from a strong man by deadly pain. At another time Carter would probably have passed on. One grows callous to suffering in West Africa, and to interfere with a sick native seldom brings thanks and very frequently produces complications. But something just then moved him to play the Samaritan.

He put his head through the entrance and peered into the darkness. "Well," he said, "who's here, and what's the matter?"

A voice replied in stately Haûsa, "O, Effendi, I am close upon death, and it is hard to die far from one's own lands and people."

"Let's have a look at you," said Carter, in what he knew of the same tongue, eked out with Kroo and Okky. He scraped a damp and reluctant match. "Holy Christopher! What have you been doing to your thigh?"

"As I marched along the road to here, a leopard sprang and seized me, but the men that were with me speared him, and so I escaped with my life. They made a litter, and on it carried me to this place. And here they left me in the hands of Allah, whilst they followed up their own private affairs."

"But, man, the wound's alive. Why didn't you have it dressed?"

"It was written that the wound should be as it is."

"Rot. You stay here another ten minutes or so till I get the tackle, and then I will clean it out for you."

"Effendi, it is written that Allah sent the things that

are in the wound, and with due submission I will not have them touched."

"Hum," said Carter, "now this requires argument. You savvy Constantinople? I mean I'Stamboul?"

"There lives the Kaleef, the chief of the Faithful of Islam."

"You've got it in once. Now, are you keeping yourself posted in the Sultan's—that is the Kaleef's latest readings of the Koran? You are not. I can see you have let yourself get thoroughly behind the times. What's your name?"

"Ali ben Hossein."

"Well, Ali, I know what's the matter with you spiritually. You've been thinking too much of the things of this life—fighting, trading and so on. You've spread your mat and faced Mecca, and said your daily prayer in a formal sort of way, but you've been neglecting the moolah. You have been lax in your attendance at mosque, and for a fiver you aren't half the man at the Koran you used to be."

"The Effendi is very wise."

"I am. I can't help it."

"He has hit upon this Believer's sin."

"Dead on the spot. So now let's get to the point. In your ignorance, you believe that Allah sent all those crawling horrors that are in your wound?"

"For His own wise purposes He sent them. Allah can do no wrong."

"You are mixing up theological facts. Allah can do no wrong. But what about Sheitan?"

"I spit upon his name, O Effendi," said Ali ben Hossein, and did it.

"Hear now then the pronouncement of the Kaleef Abdul Hamed of I'Stamboul. The unclean things that haunt the wounds of the Faithful are no longer sent by Allah

as a test of Faith. They are sent now by Sheitan as a torment to True Believers, and as an antidote, the Prophet, through the Kaleef, has sent a liquid of his own devising, of which by a happy chance I have a portion in the factory."

"Is it green in color?"

"Green as the skirts of the houris of Paradise," said Carter, and thanked heaven for a small parcel of aniline dyes (green amongst them) which had been sent by an enterprising Bradford dyeware merchant, to the order of a dyer in far off Kano.

"Then," said Ali ben Hossein simply, "if you, O Effendi, can relieve me from the torments of Sheitan, from which I am suffering, I and my sons will remember your name in the fullest gratitude. Have you the holy liquid here?"

"Not in my pocket, O Ali ben Hossein, for I am not a djinn. But there is a medicine chest up at the factory, and within it is a bottle of crystal, blue in color, in which are tabloids which bear the giaour name of perchloride of mercury. They and the aniline green may take a bit of finding, but presently when I've got a solution made, and tinted to a True Believer's taste, I will return here and work upon you that cure of which I am sure that the Kaleef Abdul would approve if he'd a thigh as bad as yours, and had ever heard of an antiseptic dressing. So see to it that you don't slip through the gates of Paradise whilst I am gone. D'you understand? The houris won't look twice at a Haûsa with a leg as worm-eaten as yours."

Now, Carter gathered from a casual inspection by two damp matches that ben Hossein's thigh was pretty bad, but he had not made allowance for the toughness of a water-drinking, spare-eating Moslem. When he came back with a paraffin lamp, followed by White-Man's-Trouble,

who carried a bowl of warm water and other things, and commenced his amateur surgery, he was amazed, and he was sickened. Like most traders in the West Coast factories, he had acquired through almost daily practice a certain deftness in cleansing and repairing wounds; but here in the thigh of this great muscular Haûsa was a grid of gashes whose untended horrors went far beyond all his previous experience.

The fact that the man had not bled to death, or died of shock at the first impact, and the further fact that he had withstood the attacks of all the abominable live things that preyed thereafter upon his open flesh, were a wonderful testimonial to his constitutional toughness; and the detail that in spite of his fortitude he went clammy and limp when Carter commenced dressing the wounds, was only what could be expected. But it seemed that five days had elapsed since the man had been brought in and left, and during that time the other merchants outside the fort, with the ordinary callousness of Africans for one another, had neither brought him food nor reported his calamity. On the other hand, they had stolen his goods and gone their ways, otherwise non-interferent. And as a consequence the man was three parts starved when Carter found him and had his vitality perilously lowered.

Carter had, perhaps, as has been stated, much of the West Coast trader's callousness for the native, but he certainly had all of the surgeon's interest in a patient. After he had dressed the wounds he tried his best to bring his patient back to consciousness, and then for the first time only did he realize how near to the Borderland the man had crept. He sent White-Man's-Trouble flying this way and that on his errands, and with all the limited knowledge in his power fought Death for the Haûsa's life till the fatal hour of dawn was well past.

And so he was found by Miss O'Neill at 5 A.M., white, shaken and black-eyed, attired in stained and sodden clothes, squatting in a miserable hutch that reeked of iodoform, and welcoming with joy Ali ben Hossein's ungracious return to a world he had so nearly left.

Miss O'Neill regarded him for awhile with a pinched lip, and then "I think you are perfectly disgraceful," said she. "At least you might have let me know what you were doing, so that I could have come to help part of the time."

Carter blinked at her for a moment with tired brown eyes and then pulled himself together. "I beg your pardon for not doing as you wished. But I didn't know that you were interested in niggers, if there was no chance of making a dividend out of them. I rather looked upon this as an out-of-office-hours job; as a piece of private amusement of my own, in fact, and so I did not dare to repeat it."

"Well," said Kate, seating herself beside the sick man, "perhaps I was hateful to you after supper, indeed I'll admit that I was. But you are being far more hateful to me now, and as that should tickle your vanity as a man, perhaps you'll be generous enough to call it quits. Trouble, will you kindly take Mr. Carter back to the factory and give him a large dose of quinine and all the hot, scalding tea he will drink, and then put him to bed, and see to it that there are no insects inside his mosquito bar."

"I fit," said the Krooboy. "An' I got bottle of White man's medicine dat I pinch from dem Cappie Image. I give dem Carter a drink of him."

"You will do nothing of the sort. Dem Cappie Image patent medicine plenty bad ju-ju for Mr. Carter. So you will do exactly as I ordered you. Ah, and here's Laura. Now, my dear, if you don't want the man to whom you're

engaged to die before you marry him, you'd better look after him and his health very narrowly. There, get away out of this, the pair of you, and make up your silly quarrel, whatever it may be."

"But, Kate, George and I have no quarrel. Why, it was you——"

"If you haven't a quarrel, my dear, invent one, if it's only for the amusement of making it up. I'm told it's one of the chief luxuries of an engagement. Now, please go, or you'll disturb Hossein. Hossein's the man who wants attention here, and I can't have you bothering about the place till he's better."

Hossein was in fact the lucky man. Miss O'Neill, for reasons best known to herself, nursed him in person; Carter retained his interest as original discoverer; White-Man's-Trouble fussed round him because it was the popular thing to do, and Laura was also diligent in her attendance on the sick room for reasons well-known to herself.

But Ali ben Hossein had all a Moslem gentleman's diffidence with women, and he said little enough to either Laura or Kate; the Krooboy was his caste inferior, and he spoke to him only to give curt orders; and it was to Carter alone that he was communicative.

His native tongue was Haûsa, of course, but he had been a trader all his life, and that in West Africa entails a knowledge of languages. Carter knew little enough of Haûsa, but he was handy with Okky and sound on Kroo, and so when one vocabulary failed him, he passed on to another, and was generally understood. Thus, by very rapid degrees an intimacy grew between them, to as far an extent as the color barrier would permit.

They talked on weapons and they talked on war; they talked of sport as each of them understood it; they talked

on horse-breeding as it was practised in Kano and Sokoto, and also of horse-breeding as it was carried on in the Craven district and the Yorkshire dales.

Carter tried without any success whatever to make Hossein understand the humor of the battle of the roses as it was waged between his father and mother in the Yorkshire vicarage; the Haûsa in his turn gave the light side of a slave-hunting raid, and made Carter's flesh creep.

They had abundant interests in common, too, in the romance of commerce, and discussed regretfully the decay of ivory and the sensational rise of rubber. Carter as the paid servant of O'Neill and Craven tried to hear of rubber lands which could be bought and resold to an English company, but Ali ben Hossein was emphatic in his refusal to help a white immigration onto the acres of his fatherland.

"Let us talk as traders, oh Effendi. Do not ask me to be the traitor who will make smooth the path for the invader. And for the present I bid you to consider this shortage in the supply of pink kola nuts. Now, the white kola nuts, which have not that dryness which is demanded by the palates of the Western Soudan, we can get from Lagos and the Coast factories in larger quantities than ever. But the growers declare the crop of pink nuts to be practically a failure this year, and therein I say they lie."

And so on, with matter which had too technical a flavor to carry general interest.

Now, the leopard had clawed Ali ben Hossein's thigh grievously, and the subsequent neglect of the wound had been abominable, but the man had been a clean liver and his toughness was great. In ten days he could hobble, and in a fortnight announced his departure.

"I am a merchant without merchandise, Effendi, and must needs be back about my affairs. If I do not gather them into my hands again another will."

"I'd stand you tick to the extent of a dozen loads of goods if I had 'em," said Carter cordially, "but as you've seen for yourself, the factory's cleaned out. And Allah knows when the next steamer will drive in."

"May your tribe increase, Effendi. I have had too much at your hands already. But though no money may pass over what you have done, yet I ask you to accept a gift, that is a mere token."

It was a piece of gray stone which sprouted with rich brown crystals. It was shaped like a squat duck, some inch and a half long, and Ali ben Hossein wore it alongside the little leather parcel which held a verse of the Koran and hung by a thong from his neck.

"O Effendi, you are young, and that will bring you pleasure more than could be bought with ten quills of gold. Wear that, and your grief will fade."

"Poof!" said Carter, "I've no griefs."

Ali ben Hossein waved aside the statement with a long slim hand, the hand of the Haûsa swordsman for whose narrow grip Central African armorers make sword hilts that no grown Englishman can use. "O Effendi, my sickness was of the leg. Neither my eyes nor my ears were touched by the leopard, and since I lay here I have both seen and heard. There is a woman that I have watched, a woman with brown hair that has in it the glint of copper. She flaunts you now, as is the way of women with those they love; but she is the one you desire, and presently (having this charm) you will take her to wife. Indeed, she will come to your house without purchase and of free will."

"You mistake," said Carter with a sigh. "It is the black-haired one that I am contracted to marry."

Ben Hossein smiled. He was not to be turned from his idea by a small argument like that. "You may take her

as the lesser wife, but I know who will rule your harem, Effendi."

"You polygamous old scoundrel! I beg your pardon, ben Hossein, but you're on the wrng tack, and so please let us change the subject. This charm, this duck, is made of what we call tin-stone. Does it come from Haûsaland?"

"No, Effendi. It is found nearer to here than the Haûsa country. There is a great island of red twisted stone that rears itself up out of the bush, and this stone that the duck is made of lies amongst it. There is no value in the charm as a stone, but only value in its shape, which is that of a duck as you see, Effendi. Half the twisted mountain is made of that stone, and the river that runs along its base at times eats into it."

"How far is it from here?"

"Twelve—no, thirteen marches. Look, I will spread this sand upon the floor and draw you the roads. . . . But the country is evil, Effendi, and though you go there and spend a lifetime in search, yet will you not find another stone formed like a duck. To get this, my grandfather sent a hundred slaves who raked amongst the screes for a year."

"This is tin-ore," said Carter, "and I tell you frankly, ben Hossein, that there is a fortune in what you have told me."

"I wish," said ben Hossein gravely, "that there were ten fortunes, and so I could perhaps repay one-tithe of what I owe to you, Effendi. May Allah be with you. I go now back towards my people, and if Allah will, we shall meet again."

"Now, this stone and this tale must go to Kate," said Carter to himself, and went in towards the factory and up

the stairs to the veranda. Kate came out of the mess room to meet him, and waved a cablegram.

"I have just de-coded it," she cried exultingly. "They have accepted my terms."

"I wish you would de-code the 'they.'"

"The German firm that owned Mokki before we came."

"What, the people you bought it from?"

She nodded.

"But why on earth sell it back to them?"

"Because, my dear Mr. Carter, they are going to give me £9,000 for the produce we have collected, and another £8,000 for the fort and the good-will of the business. How's that? £17,000 cash against a £1,500 outlay in three months. That's better than staying out here in West Africa."

Carter had been carrying the duck in his hand. He put it into his pocket. "I don't wonder you're exultant. I suppose no other girl on earth ever made a coup like that. And as for us here at the factory, that means our occupation's gone?"

"Oh, I hope you'll go back to Malla-Nulla, where you were, and work for us there."

"I think not. As you're going home, and I cannot be of any immediate use to O'Neill and Craven, I prefer to leave the firm's employ if you'll let me?"

"We shall be really sorry to lose you. But perhaps you have something better in view?"

"To tell the truth, I have. And it strikes me if I'm to make a fortune, I must look out for it myself."

"I quite agree with you," said Kate. "What was that you were going to show me? The thing you put in your pocket, I mean?"

"A keepsake that was given me. It's a charm, a ju-ju that will bring fortune to somebody, and I was going to

give it to you. But on your own recommendation I shall keep it for myself."

"You are quite right. It will be safer for us to go our own several ways from here."

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CHAPTER XIII

AT THE LIVERPOOL END

Now, Godfrey O'Neill, deceased, was a man who at various times in his life had extracted from West Africa very considerable sums of money. He was shrewd, he was popular, he had the knack of resisting sickly climates, and he knew the possibilities of the Oil Rivers seaboard down to the last bag of kernels.

According to his own account he had started life as a ship's purser. People who were more fond of accuracy mentioned that as a matter of history he had first gone as cabin-boy in a palm oil brig. But be that as it may, he had been associated with the Coast from his earliest days, and at the age of five-and-twenty was trading there on his own account.

At first he stuck to an old trading hulk with moorings in the muddy Monk River and battled with its swarms of cockroaches and got together a business; but by degrees he gained the confidence of the native riparian magnates, and by the time he was thirty he had built on piles a fine set of factory buildings on the bank, had bought a treaty with the then King of Okky, and had built another factory at Malla-Nulla in spite of the fact that the beach there was one of the most surf-smitten on the Coast. After that he felt that his Liverpool correspondents were getting more than their due share of his hard-wrung profits, and so he put the Coast factories under managers and came back to the Mersey. And thereafter, with occasional visits

to the Coast and the Islands, he made Liverpool his headquarters.

He had an office in Water Street, a warehouse near Huskisson Dock, and a house furnished with mid-Victorian solidity and ugliness out at Princes' Park. A sister, Mrs. Craven, whose unsatisfactory husband had conveniently died on the Coast, kept house for him, and as she voted marriage a failure, Godfrey professed himself as quite ready to take her verdict and was not anxious to dabble in dangerous experiments.

Finally, as Godfrey O'Neill discovered, after a two years' trial of the style of living that suited him at Princes' Park, that it cost him just £900 a year, he saw very little use in bestirring himself to earn more. He quite admitted that there were other luxuries in the world that he did not indulge in. He might have kept horses, for instance; but he happened to dislike them. He might have had a French chef; only plain roast beef and plain roast mutton appealed more to his appetite, and a plain British cook at £20 a year produced these exactly to his taste. He might have had a larger house, but frankly he did not want one.

So he went down to the office in Water Street every other day, and ceased to stir the business there when it showed any signs of averaging a more than £1,500 profit for any one year, not because he objected to additional wealth, but because he far preferred to play whist to pursuing money. One may here own freely that Godfrey O'Neill was an active member of no less than five whist quartettes which met at clubs and houses, and there was the amusement which after long search he had discovered pleased him best.

In the comfortable ugly house in Princes' Park, besides Godfrey and Mrs. Craven, and the two servants, there was a child who afterwards developed into the Kate O'Neill of

these memoirs. Godfrey O'Neill brought her home on the last visit he made to West Africa. She was then aged, at a theoretical reckoning, three years, and she was more fluent in the Okky tongue than in English. She had never worn shoes till Godfrey bought her a pair in Las Palmas on the voyage home.

"Is she white?" Mrs. Craven had asked.

"White, clean through," Godfrey had assured her.

"Then who are her people?"

"That I shall not tell even you. Her mother is dead. Her father has gone under. He was a very clever man once, though I must say he used to be more high and mighty than I cared about on the rare occasions that I met him. But, as I say, he's gone under, hopelessly."

"And presently," said Mrs. Craven, "when we get this little wild thing tamed, and clothed, and teach her to speak English and go to church, up will come some drunken reprobate to take her away again."

"No, he won't. I've fixed that. He'll never claim her again. To start with he doesn't know if she's in England, or Canada, or Grand Canary. I even changed the name he called her by. I called her Kate from the day I left him, and had her christened by that name in Sierra Leone on the off chance she hadn't been christened before. And to go on with, he gave me his word of honor that if I took her away, he'd never embarrass me by inquiring for her again. You see, he was living as a native, and the child was running about with the other pickaninnies in the village, and I guess I made him pretty well ashamed of himself by what I said. The mother's dead, you know."

"Poof," said Mrs. Craven, "he promised you, did he? And what do you suppose the word of a man like that is worth?" (The late Craven had, it will be remembered, his strong failings.)

"Ninety-nine beach combers out of a hundred will lie as soon as look at you," Godfrey owned. "This one is the exception. He will keep his word, at any rate on this matter. He's just as proud as a king."

"Between drinks," suggested the widow.

"He's more objectionably proud drunk than sober. He always quotes Latin at one when he's full, and then says, 'Ah, but you've not been to school anywhere, so you'll not understand that.' You needn't be frightened he'll call here, Jane. Just remember I'm a man with a taste for ease myself. If I'd thought there was the smallest chance of being bothered with him, I shouldn't have saddled myself with the kid."

"Well," said Mrs. Craven, "as you have brought her, I suppose we must do the best we can for her. The average orphanage doesn't take them till they are six, but I suppose if we hunt round we can find some sort of institution which will accept three-year-olds."

"Orphanage, h'm. You see, Jane, I was thinking we might keep her ourselves. I am sure we could look after her."

"I object to the word 'we,'" said Mrs. Craven dryly.

"Oh, I suppose most of the work would fall on your shoulders."

"I am sure of it."

"Come along, old lady, don't you think you can manage it? Kitty isn't a bad sort of kid. Y'know, I saw a goodish deal of her on the steamer coming home."

"I thought you gave her in charge of a steward?"

"I never told you that."

Mrs. Craven laughed. "You see, I know your little ways—'Steward, here's a girl for you. If you nursery-maid the kid nicely till we get to Liverpool, and don't let me see more of her than I want, and don't let her come

in and prattle when I'm playing whist with Captain Image, there'll be another quid for you when we land. After that my sister will take her over, and she won't want a tip at all."

"H'm," said Godfrey, "now, diamonds aren't in your line."

"I wouldn't be seen with one. I'll take a brown cloth gown, please."

"Shall I order it?"

"No, you can pay the bill."

"Right-o. Then you will take Kitty and bring her up here?"

"You stupid goose," said Mrs. Craven, "I intended that from the moment I saw her. Cook's out buying her a cot this minute."

Here then was the way that Kate first came into the house at Princes' Park. She arrived without a surname, and Godfrey, in spite of hints and plain questions, kept back any further pedigree. The child arranged a name for herself. When she had been a year in England she went out to a small folks' party:

"Let me see, what's your name?" asked the hostess, who had got tangled up among her many small guests.

The child had answered "Kate O'Neill," as a matter of course. She had called Mrs. Craven, Aunt Jane, and her brother Uncle Godfrey from the first, and after that juvenile party she was introduced as "my niece, Kate O'Neill."

As she grew, anything to do with West Africa and with business fascinated her, and curiously enough her principal instructor in these matters was Mrs. Craven. Godfrey, honest man, was not going to be bothered. His repartee when Kate asked him anything about the Coast

was, "Go and invite some one to come in and let's make up a rubber of whist." When one day he died, and left Kate the O'Neill and Craven business, both she and her aunt supposed he had done it as an effort of humor.

Mrs. Craven had the house and furniture at Princes' Park, and a comfortable annuity to keep it up on. Kate came into a business that had been thoroughly neglected, and allowed to run down till it was in a very shaky position, indeed, financially.

"Sell it," said Mrs. Craven, "for what it will fetch."

"I'd rather run it myself," said Kate.

"Rubbish," said her aunt; "you're twenty, and the world's before you to enjoy. Besides, my dear, you're sure to marry. Sell the business."

"If you want plain facts, aunt, I don't see why anyone should give sixpence for it, and if we tried to wind it up, it would mean bankruptcy. Some of the money's a very long way out."

"Your poor Uncle Godfrey intended to leave you comfortably off, I know."

"And I'm pleased to think he died believing he had done so. They had the quaintest way of keeping books down at Water Street. Cutting notches on a tally-stick was nothing to some of their dodges. They hadn't struck a proper balance sheet for years, and both Uncle Godfrey and Mr. Crewdson really and honestly imagined that the firm was flourishing."

"You sell," said Mrs. Craven.

"Not I, aunt. Uncle Godfrey left me the concern believing it to be a small fortune for me, and a fortune I'm going to make out of it, and not a small one, either."

"I don't believe in business women," said Mrs. Craven severely. "I'd rather see a womanly woman."

"My dear," said Kate, "you shall see the two combined

in me presently. I'm going to make a ve-ry large and extensive fortune; but the moment you see anything unfeminine about me, I want you to tell me, and I'll sell out forthwith."

Thereafter from eight o'clock A.M. to six-thirty P.M. for five days a week Kate sat in an inner room of the Water Street office, with the ancient Crewdson as a buffer between her and the world. She came into the place with a talent for figures, and a good general idea of the business, and she set herself first to the conversion of Mr. Crewdson.

That worthy old person was entirely of opinion that what was good enough for poor Mr. Godfrey was quite good enough for anybody else, and (when pressed) said so with unfriendly plainness. A man, in Kate's shoes, would have dismissed him, and brought in younger blood. Kate preferred conversion. She knew that there was a great quarry of information on matters West African stowed beneath Mr. Crewdson's dull exterior, and she intended to dig at it. So she reduced his wages, which he quite agreed with her the firm could not afford, and then, unasked, offered him a fine commission on the next year's profits. It was curious to see how soon she galvanized him into an opinion that these profits must certainly be forthcoming.

She laid in a typewriter, burned the office quills, wrote the firm's letters, signed them *For O'Neill and Craven, K. O'Neill*, and before she knew it had created a personality. Ten callers a day—captains, pursers, traders, merchants—wanted to shake hands with "your new head, Mr. K.," and went away with the idea that old Crewdson had suddenly developed capacity, and on the strength of it had stood himself a new signature.

On Saturdays, during the summer, Miss O'Neill caught

butterflies, and in the winter played golf. On Sunday morning she went to church. On Sunday afternoons and evenings she had something very nearly approaching a salon. On these latter occasions Mrs. Craven flattered herself that she brought success by her artistic attention to the commissariat.

Now, the girl was attractive to men, and although she was emphatically a girl's girl, still she had as many friends of one sex as the other. She was good-looking, she was amusing, she was always well turned out, and she carried about with her that indescribable charm (above and beyond these other matters) which always makes people desirous of warming up a first acquaintance into intimacy.

To one man only had she shown any special degree of preference, and he was enough encouraged thereby to propose marriage to her.

She accepted him—provisionally.

"I am not absolutely certain that I wish to be married just yet," she told him, "but I am going abroad now, and I will let you know definitely when I return. Those are not nice terms, but they are the best I can offer. I have always been able to give a 'yes' or 'no' decision on every other matter in life so far. But here I can't. It is weak of me. Perhaps it is merely womanly."

"You are exquisite in your womanliness, as you are exquisite in everything else," he had replied. "I am grateful for any bone of comfort you throw me, Kitty dear."

She was going away then to West Africa, as has been related above, and the man saw her off from the landing stage. She returned the waving of his handkerchief. "Now, if you had abused me for my indecision, and said you would either be engaged or not engaged, I believe I'd have married you out of hand if you'd wanted me. But you didn't seem able to clinch things, and so anyhow

you're pigeon-holed for the present. I'm glad I made you keep our little matter secret."

The man's name was Austin. Many times during the voyage south through the Bay, and down the Trades from the Islands, Kate told herself she ought to announce the fact that she was engaged. But on every occasion her femininity got up in arms. "Certainly not," said this intangible force. "Mr. Austin is a man, and if he cares to be a man and gossip, why let him. But a woman by reason of her sex is not called upon to say more than she needs." So Kate held her tongue, and regretted more and more every day that—well—that she should have cause for regrets.

When she got back to England, a day ahead of time, Aunt Jane happened to be in London, but Austin had a wire from Point Lynas and was there on the landing stage to meet her. He wanted to kiss her there before the world, but she had the advantage of height, and avoided him skilfully and without advertisement. Their subsequent handshake was somewhat of a failure.

"Hullo, Henry," said Miss O'Neill, "fancy seeing you here. I suppose you will try and make out you came down here to the landing stage on purpose to meet me? How abominably hot Liverpool is, and how atrociously the Mersey smells after that nice clean Smooth River. Have you caught me any butterflies? I've brought four cases full home from the Coast, and I honestly believe I've got two unnamed specimens. If they turn out new, I shall christen one after myself—something O'Neillii. There's vanity for you! And now for the Customs House."

"Is that all you have to say to me, Kitty? I've been just hungry all the time to see you again. I don't think a single hour of a single day has passed but what I have thought of you, and where you were, and what you were doing."

"Well, Henry, that's more than I could say. Here, wait till I catch that porter's eye. He's taking my cabin trunk to the wrong heap. About what was in my head between here and the Coast, I'll not say, but once out there, I'll tell you frankly I gave little enough thought to anything except Coast interests. The first place I went ashore at after Sierra Leone was our own factory at Smoothi, and they'd had a fight there which only ended up when our whistle blew. The clearing between the factory buildings and the forest was full of dead men. I found out that no fewer than 800 Okky savages had attacked the place, and they were all held off by one of our clerks with a couple of Winchesters, and a half-caste girl who loaded for him. It sounds like a tale out of a book, and you needn't believe it unless you like; I don't think I should believe it unless I had seen things for myself, but I did see the men who had been actually shot when they tried to rush the place, and I can guarantee the truth of the story."

"Don't tell me there's a romance between you and your clerk."

"There wasn't room for one. He was engaged to the heroine already, and was as consistently rude to me as he knew how. But I don't mind telling you he was a magnificent fellow. He was a gentleman, too, which is rather a rare thing to find on the Coast. But you're letting me do all the talk. You haven't told me about yourself. What have you been doing?"

"The usual work of a busy solicitor; getting new clients, and sticking to the old ones. I can report good, steady success, Kitty. We can start pretty comfortably."

A Customs searcher put his usual questions, and Kate smiled on him and said she had nothing to declare. He scrawled a chalk hieroglyphic on all her property without opening a single piece. "There, look, Henry, stop that

porter. He's taking a case of mine to the wrong cab. Thanks, I wouldn't have lost that case for a king's ransom."

"Butterflies?"

"No, a native war horn in ivory."

"Oh, they're fairly common."

"Yes, but a friend gave me this, and I want to keep it. There, I think that's the lot. Good-by, Henry. You'll come and see me at Princes' Park when I'm settled down again?"

"But, Kitty, can't I drive out with you now? I'd so looked forward to driving back with you. There's plenty of room in the cab."

"No," said Kate, "I'd rather you went home now, and thought over again what I'm like now that I've come back to England with a West Coast flavor. I know you'll disapprove of me as a possible wife, but I do hope you'll see your way of keeping me on the list of your friends. Nobody knows you ever suggested anything more, unless you have told them, and I don't see why they should know. But I'm more than ever convinced that I'm not the girl to make you the wife you deserve. Don't answer me now, there's a nice boy. Just go to the club and have a good dinner, and ring me up some time this evening and say you thoroughly agree with me."

Mrs. Craven came back that evening from London and Kate told her of West Africa happenings with a fine wealth of detail.

The old lady looked at her very narrowly and when she had finished, "Yes, my dear," said she, "and now are you going to tell me something that will interest me far more than all that?"

"No, Aunt, I think you have got the pith of it."

"If you won't tell, you won't. But you must remember,

Kitty dear, I have known you and nursed you ever since you were a tiny child, and you can't change—as you have done—without my noticing it. Now, this Mr. Carter——”

“Yes, I did forget to tell you that he's got frightfully red hair.”

“You say he's engaged to Laura Slade?”

“Oppressively so.”

“But is he going to marry her?”

“How can I tell, Aunt?”

“Who is he going to marry, Kitty dear?”

CHAPTER XIV

TIN HILL: THE JOURNEY

Now, lead-mining has been stopped in Upper Wharfedale these thirty years, but still a boy who has been brought up in a village there may well have some general knowledge of ores and the methods of getting them. The mining first began in those dim British days before the Romans came, and it has continued on down through the centuries till the influx of foreign lead brought prices below £25 a ton, and the mines could not be worked at a profit.

Raw dumps and grass-covered dumps are traceable on every hand, and though the older tunnels are obliterated, there are still enough shafts and drifts and adits to be found in the gray stone hills to occupy many months' exploration.

George Carter had heard of the past glories of lead from his earliest years, and old residents pointed to the ruined cottages that were filled and flourishing when the village held 500 people who lived by the mines, instead of the 200 who dwelt there now and made a lean living out of a little limp farming. With pockets stuffed with candle-ends he had splashed into the old levels and wandered for miles in the heart of the limestone hills and hacked with rusty pickheads at forgotten working faces; he had raked amongst the old ruined machinery beside the dumps; he had studied the run of the water races, and as far as a man with a natural engineering bent may reconstruct

these things from memorials of the past, he had done so most thoroughly, and, in the old unscientific way, was as good a miner as any of those blue-gummed ruffians of the past, and that without even having seen a lead mine in real work.

Tin-stone he had seen in a not very well-equipped school museum; a tin mine he knew only from an old book on Cornwall, which treated that country more from the picturesque point of view than the mechanical or the scientific.

But the thing that had fired his mind one baking day at Malla-Nulla was a newspaper paragraph which spoke of the price of tin. Up till then, like the majority of the human race, he had not troubled his head as to whether tin was £5 a ton or £50. But here he saw that it had gone up to no less a figure than £207 10s. per ton. He wished he could find a tin mine, but concluding he might as well search that particular part of steamy West Africa for great auk's eggs, went no further than framing the wish.

Then came the happenings at Mokki, and Ali ben Hossein's parting gift of the little gray stone duck which had unmistakable brown tin crystals for its head, its wings and its feet, and on the top of all arrived Kate's cablegram. A sweating operator had read that message from under sea, as it winked out in a darkened cable hut; runners had carried the curt words along roaring beaches, paddlers had borne them by canoe up muddy creeks, a great bank in far-off Hamburg had pledged the performance of their promise. A day later the slatternly S.S. *Frau Pobst* lurched untidily up the muddy creeks, and commenced to ease the factory buildings of their overflowing wealth of West African produce.

Carter itched to be off. It had come to this; he could

not trust himself in Kate's neighborhood. Laura Slade saw, or fancied she saw how things were, and bravely asked him one day to break their engagement.

But Carter drew her down onto the office chair beside him and put an arm round her and kissed her. "Now," he said, "tell out frankly who it is that you like better than you like me?"

"It isn't that, George."

"Well, as Cascaes is the only alternative, I didn't suppose it was. Come now, out with it, what's the trouble? I suppose you're just going to be a woman and tell me it's my fault? I don't agree with you. I'm the same me as always was—red hair, large feet, and as big an appetite as the Coast will allow."

She put her face against his shoulder. "It's Kate, George."

"You must let me refer to her as Miss O'Neill," said Carter dryly. "You see, she's my employer—or was—and we're naturally not on intimate terms— Well, what's Miss O'Neill got to do with my marrying you?"

"She's always been opposed to it."

"Twaddle! Now, look here, my dear, you've been nervy and upset ever since that bit of a scrap at Smooth River. Now, haven't you?"

"I suppose I have."

"I'm sure of it. And it's not surprising. That was a pretty tough time for any girl to go through. Well, as I've told you, I've got my nose onto a fortune that's tucked away up in the bush, and I'm going to look for it. In the meanwhile, as I managed to screw sixty golden sovereigns out of that greedy old Baggins for curios that he'll sell for at least a hundred and forty, there's just that amount of cash to take you on a jaunt to Grand Canary for rose growing."

"Rose growing?"

"To put color in your cheeks, then, you pale young person."

"But I couldn't take the money from you."

"And pray who has a greater right to take care of you, and prescribe what's best for you, and look after you generally? D'you think I want to marry a wife who isn't in the pink of condition?"

"I like to look nice for you, dear, but I couldn't take that money from you now of all times."

"How do you mean?"

"When you are just going off on some desperate expedition into the bush, and want every penny that can be scraped together."

Carter laughed. "There you go, wanting to lead me into temptation. Wanting me to take money in my pocket to buy (presumably) kid gloves and fire-escapes in the shops of the bush villages, and spend my nights in local music halls. Fie on you that will one of these days have to turn into a thrifty wife! I shall avoid these temptations. I shall travel as unostentatiously as possible, and so ensure getting through. I shall take with me White-Man's-Trouble only, if the beggar will condescend to go and live on native chop, for the best of all possible reasons that it wouldn't be possible to take a lot of carriers. Can't you see, my dear, that the choice lies between a three-thousand-pound expedition, with carriers, and all the rest of it, and going quietly, and being too obviously poor to rob?"

"I suppose there is something in that. Father went quietly."

"Of course he did, and so shall I. Some day, if things pan out as I hope, I may march up country at the tail end of a brass band, and do the thing in style; but not tomorrow, thank you. So if you won't take charge of our

superfluous £60 and decorate Grand Canary with it, I'm hanged if I don't dash it amongst the factory boys here, and have one flaring jamboree before we part company."

"Oh, George, you are good!"

"Don't you fret about my goodness, old lady. I'm a pretty bad fellow at the bottom, only I try and keep my worst points out of your sight. Man has to, you know, with the girl he's engaged to. It's only playing the game. Now, you let me go, and I'll just slip across to the *Frau* and blarney her old Dutch skipper into giving you the best room he's got to fight the cockroaches in."

It was on a Thursday that the *Frau Pobst* steamed away back down the muddy creeks laden with one of the richest cargoes that one single factory had ever collected in West Africa, and on that same day Carter set off into the bush. Kate and Laura were to brave the terrors of the steamer together as far as the Islands, and they found the boat even more unspeakable than they had imagined her from the outrageous descriptions of Captain Image and Mr. Balgarnie.

Now, as regards the matter of that £60, Carter, to put the matter bluntly, had lied. With the King of Okky doing what he could to keep the country side in a ferment, to go up into the bush even with a strong party, and well provided, was risky. To go with empty pockets, and with no following, seemed very little short of suicide.

But Carter refused to see it in this light. "I'm tough," he told himself, "and I've worked up a certain reputation for ju-ju. If I use my wits I shall get through, and be successful. I absolutely refuse to die here in Africa. I've promised to marry Laura, and, let it cost what it may, I'm going to do it. I must; I've promised; and, besides, she's absolutely no other prospect before her. But I do

wish to goodness I'd a decent shotgun. I'm no kind of hand with this badly balanced Winchester."

So, with a high courage, he addressed himself to departure, and invited White-Man's-Trouble with the promise of goods, lands, goats, wives, guns, and the other things that go to make up a Krooboy competency, to accompany him. It was without surprise that he received a flat refusal.

"O Carter," said his servant, "I no fit for lib for bush. I got 'nother palaver too-much-important here at factory. Dem headman of factory boys say to me, 'Sar, you been stand-by-at-crane boy on steamah? An' I say, 'Sar, I plenty-much-too-good educate.' And he say to me, 'Sar, you fit for lib here an' take dem job of second headman?' An' I say to him, 'Sar, I fit.' O Carter, if I lib for bush with you, an' let Okky-men spear me, an' leopards chop me, I dam fool."

"You're a cheerful animal. If you think you are more likely to get an archbishopric by staying here, by all means stay. Hope you'll like the Dutchmen when they come."

White-Man's-Trouble crooked a bunch of fingers, and scratched his ribs. "O Carter, dem Dutchman all-e-same bush-Englishmen?"

"You've got it in once. I've no doubt they're a most degraded lot."

"Dem Dutchman he no have as much savvy as an Englishman?"

"Nowhere near. They wouldn't have chucked up the factory in the first instance if they had, and in the second no Englishman would have bought it back again at such an absurd figure as they were fools enough to pay Missy Kate."

"O Carter?"

"Well?"

"I fit for steal small-small sometimes from Englishmen?"

"I can guarantee that, you scamp."

"Then," said White-Man's-Trouble triumphantly, "I fit for steal plenty-much-big from Dutchman, an' he no savvy."

"You'll taste abundance of chiquot, my lad."

"The Krooboy snapped a piebald thumb and finger. "I take chiquot from Englishman, not from bush-Englishman. If he flog me with chiquot, I put ju-ju on him—" He picked up an empty bottle and handled it thoughtfully. "Ju-ju, if dem Dutchmen give me chiquot."

"Of the powdered-glass variety in his morning sausage," said Carter thoughtfully. "Well, it would be no use warning the poor devils, because, in the first place, they wouldn't believe me, and in the second they'd get it all the same. I guess these new colonizers must worry out the methods of dealing with the natives for themselves, as their betters did before them. And for myself, I fancy a knapsack will be the wear. Thank the Lord, I've tramped a good many hundred miles with one before."

Now, Carter was strong, and he carried, moreover, a high courage and a fierce energy, which even the steamy atmosphere of the West Coast could not damp. Malaria he had with a certain regular periodicity, but he was one of those rare men who threw off the attacks with speed, and suffered little from their after effects. He was essentially moderate in his habits of life, carrying a healthy hunger but never overeating, being neither a drunkard nor a teetotaller through fear of drink. Moreover, he did not abuse quinine, coffee, tobacco or drugs. As a consequence, in that much-anathematized climate he preserved a very level health and energy, and owned a normal mind where most men were either hysterical or morbid.

He had come ashore at Malla-Nulla, when he first landed on that ugly beach from the *M'poso*, with two Gladstone bags. One of these had been looted by some light-fingered merchant of the interior. The other still remained with him, and had journeyed to Mokki. Its notable tint of yellow had long since vanished. In places it was mottled black with mildew, and the rest of the surface was a good mulatto brown. The fastenings had burst, and been replaced by rope.

He looked at it with a moment's indecision. It would make a vastly ugly knapsack—but—it represented one of his few remaining possessions in the world. (The £60, or, to be precise, the sum of £57 6s. 10d., which he had forced Laura to carry off, had emptied his purse to the dregs.) And as he could not make up his mind to desert the bag, he packed what things he thought essential within its leaky leather sides, arranged rope beackets for his shoulders, slung it on his back, tucked the Winchester aforesaid under his arm, and set off down the narrow forest road which ben Hossein had indicated, without further word of farewell with anybody.

The heat of noon had just faded, but the eighteen-inch wide road was walled in with dense high bush, and the air down in that narrow cut was breathless and stagnant. When the road curved away from the sun and the high walls threw a shadow, Carter waited for a moment and panted; when the sun teemed rays of molten brass directly down on him from overhead, he hurried; and so moved on at an average gait of three miles to the hour, which is good travelling for West Africa.

It is curious how the brain works in these hours of discomfort and abnormal stress. The one thing that occupied Carter's mind was a rather good specimen of Okky war horn. It had been of ivory, massive, well-carved, and

with a mouthpiece of more than usual elaboration. In fact, it was the finest specimen he had come across, and he was a judge. He had purchased it from its native owner to copy for Mr. Balgarnie's markets. But he had seen Kate's eye upon it just before the *Frau Probst* took her away, and with the impulse of the moment had given it to her. She took it at once, and thanked him lightly enough, and he told himself, forgot it a moment later. A thousand times he called himself an ass for trying to keep in her memory. What was he, a factory clerk, to Miss O'Neill? And what, indeed, was Miss O'Neill to him—an engaged man?

The bush rustled back at him: "Laura is—well, what you know. Laura's got a lick of the tar brush. Laura is probably the identical person a certain reverend gentleman in Upper Wharfedale especially warned you against. Laura may pass muster in Grand Canary, but she won't do further North. Fancy Laura in Wharfedale!" Good God, in Wharfedale! Now he came to think of it, he had never talked to Laura about home, and the moors, and the grouse, and the roses.

He laughed noisily at his fancies, and a flock of red and gray parrots came on to the tree tops above and cawed at him. Well, after all, there were plenty of Englishmen who lived out of England. He might initiate a new era. He might be one of the first English colonists who looked upon West Africa as a home, not a place of exile. He rubbed the sweat from his face with a long forefinger and plodded on— Why not? He seemed to have the knack of health. Why should not he and Laura become powers in the Oil Rivers? They might well rise to the rule of cities and territories.

Then a voice brought him to earth again. Someone hailed him from the rear. "Carter, O Carter!"

It was the excellent White-Man's-Trouble, who came up

sullen, frightened and abusive. His cheek-bones were whitened with lime, in token of some ju-ju charm. He took over the battered Gladstone bag, and balanced it on the centre plot of his own elaborately shaven cranium.

"I no fit for lib at dem factory an' know you carry dem load in dem dam-fool way," said the Krooboy crustily.

They pulled up that night at a small terror-shivering village, and quartered themselves on the headman. He made no secret of his displeasure at their visit. Carter talked of the glories of Mokki, and the advantages of having a steady stream of trade pouring through one's territory. The headman pointed out with peevish annoyance that the King of Okky frowned upon Mokki in particular and trade in general, and that the King's displeasure was generally fatal to those on whom it fell, even though they had the happiness to live beyond his marches. But in spite of his gloomy reception, he set before his guests a portly bowl of kanki, when his women had cooked it, and himself ate a pawful from the calabash as a testimonial to its freedom from poison.

They spread their sleeping mats that night in the dark hut from which the headman's fowls had been driven to make room for them, and next morning Carter collected some wing feathers and some bits of wood, and made a windmill to amuse the children who swarmed about the compound. Presently there arrived the headman, who saw the toy spinning in the breeze, and annexed it. He and White-Man's-Trouble harangued one another with much noise and gesture, and then there was a bustle in the village, and the cooking fires burned strongly. The headman's gloom had dropped from him like a discarded cloth; he wore in its place an air of oily obsequiousness that showed he could be quite the courtier upon occasion.

They breakfasted that morning on no mere kanki.

"Dem," said White-Man's-Trouble, pointing to the three great bowls, "dem hen-chop, dem monkey-chop, an' dem dug-chop."

"Quack-quack dug?"

"No, bow-wow dug."

"Ugh!" said Carter, "I'll leave these rich dainties to you and His Nibs there. Let me have a go at the stewed fowl. Great Christopher! No wonder rubber's so hard to collect in this country when they use up so much to make legs for their chickens. Well, thank heaven for sound teeth and a tough inside!"

"I tell dem headman," said the Krooboy when they had started their day's march, "that dem windmill will be fine ju-ju. I say to him, 'You savvy dem fight at Smooth River factory?' An' he savvy plenty. All the bush savvy of dem fight. So I tell him me an' you, we keep dem Okky-men away by ourselves, an' shoot most of them, an' kill more by dem talking-god. So dem headman savvy we plenty-big ju-ju men, an' we no fit eat kanki for breakfast."

"My dear Trouble, your powers of diplomacy are only equalled by your personal appearance. Keep it up. If your eloquence can carry us through the country on the free hotel list it will save a lot of trouble both for us and for everybody else we come near. I like to think of myself as an adventurous knight exploring the black heart of Africa, but I suppose in the States they'd call us a pair of hoboes, and set the watch-dogs at us— Gee! Look at that!"

The rifle dropped to Carter's shoulder and cracked. A herd of small deer were crossing the narrow road ahead of them, and one of them tripped and fell, and there was payment for their next night's lodging.

Thirteen days' march Ali ben Hossein had called it to

the hill where an unnamed river scoured the foot of a red-streaked bluff, and Carter, who was lean and strong and wiry, flattered himself on being able to walk as well as any Moslem in Haûsaland. But the fact remained that more than three times thirteen days passed before they reached the place, and the perils of the way proved many and glaring. In some of the villages the headmen proved hospitable; in others they would have neither truck nor dealing with any callers whatever.

The country was full of war and unrest, and there was no doubt that it was desperately poor. The cassava grounds were unplanted, the millet was unsown, the banana gardens were wantonly slashed and ruined. The small bush farmer is a creature of nerves, and he stands adversity badly. Put him under a strong over-lord, and he will serve gladly and efficiently. Leave him to himself, and when things go awry with him for too many weeks together he is apt to suddenly give up the struggle, and sit down with chin on his knees, and quietly starve to death. One cannot reckon far upon the moods of a man who is ridiculously unenthusiastic over his own life or his neighbors'.

But at one place they marched in upon red war.

The village lay amongst its farm lands in a break of the forest, and the gaps between the houses had been filled with thorns. Shots came from it at intervals, and were answered by the shots of invisible marksmen who lay within the edge of the forest. The sun glared high overhead in a fleckless sky. The air was salt with the smoke of the crude trade powder.

White-Man's-Trouble counselled retreat.

"Yes, that's all right," said Carter irritably. "No one wants to ram his head into a scrap less than I do. But where the deuce can we go to? There's been no single branch to this road we've come along, and the bush on each

side is about the thickest in Africa. Nothing short of a regiment of men with matchets would make a path through it anywhere. Going back to that last village means getting skewered. All the way along I've been wondering how on earth we got out of it without having at least ten spears rammed into each of us."

"O Carter, I no fit to go get mixed in dem fight palaver."

"You're so beastly unoriginal. Why go on repeating the same thing? I'd like further to point out that we've not had a bite to eat for twenty-four hours, and I personally can't go on living on my own fat without inconvenience, as you seem to do."

"No savvy."

"Well, to translate, I say I plenty-much fit for chop."

White-Man's-Trouble rubbed the waistband of his trousers tenderly. "Me, too," he admitted.

"Then, as there is only starvation and other unpleasant things behind, I'm going ahead to prospect. Gee! There's somebody on this side with a rifle. And, by Christopher, there's another rifle in the village shooting back!"

The flintlock trade guns roared out at intervals, and every now and again there came the sharp bark of smokeless powder, and its clean *whop-whop* of a bullet from a modern rifle. By careful watching Carter decided that there was only one rifle on each side, and he further made out that one was bombarding the other to the exclusion of all lesser interests.

Now when a man has hunger gnawing at the inside of his ribs, and knows, moreover, that any movement in retreat will be fatal, it does not take much to spur him on to an advance. So Carter went cautiously ahead, keeping well under the fringe of the cover, and White-Man's-Trouble, who was copiously afraid, and who muttered evil

things under his breath in Kroo, hung on to the remains of the Gladstone bag and crouched along at his heels.

Carter took a step at a time, and was cautious always not to rustle a leaf or tread on a dead branch. So he pushed his way ahead, and when the Krooboy, with less dexterity, blundered and made the shadow of a noise, he turned upon him with such a look of ferocity that it awed even so cross-grained a person as White-Man's-Trouble. A dozen times Carter nearly walked on to the heels of one or other of the attacking force, and as often drew off unnoticed; and at last he made his way to the place where he had located the rifle fire, and was closing in on it from behind, when of a sudden he was confronted with a rifle muzzle which suddenly spirted up from the middle of a clump of bush.

It swung up till it covered the left side of his chest, and hung steady there for an appreciable number of seconds, and then a very well-known voice said, "Well, Mr. Carter, I congratulate you on keeping your nerve in spite of the climate."

"Gee!" said Carter under his breath. "That's old Swizzle-Stick Smith."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said I'm sure that's Mr. Smith."

A bald head, garnished with an eyeglass, shaggy gray hair and a shaggy beard, came forth. "May I ask what you are doing here? Thrown up your commission by any chance?"

"Exactly that."

"On your own?"

"Well, sir, starvation's my master at present."

"Oh, I beg pardon. Go into the mess and order what you'll have. Or look here, I've shot my man, so I'm free for the moment, and I'll come with you. Whiskey we're

out of, but I can recommend gin and soda. We looted a sparklet machine, by the way, from the Frenchman."

They worked cautiously back from the firing line, and came upon a mean lean-to of boughs and thatch which Mr. Smith referred to as "my headquarters." As the messenger happened to be away, Mr. Smith kindly produced from under the eaves a damp slab of translucent cassava bread, which was obviously all the place contained in the way of food, and extracting a square-faced bottle from a green box of trade gin, poured out half a calabash full, added muddy water from a chattie, and offered it to his guest.

"Come to think of it, that's more healthy for you than soda, Mr. Carter. So you're not up here on O'Neill and Craven's service, you tell me?"

"No; handed in my papers, sir. I'm passing through here on urgent private affairs."

Mr. Smith put a hand inside his shabby pyjama coat and produced a piece of new black-watered silk ribbon, on the end of which was an eyeglass. He screwed this in place, and stared at his guest.

"Ah, then in that case, Mr. Carter, I shall have to hear more of your projects before I can give you permission to pass through my territory."

Carter stiffened. "Your territory? Oh, I remember. You've been buying up rubber lands, of course, for the firm."

"As a point of fact, I have not been worrying about the firm very lately. When I said 'my territory,' I meant exactly that, neither more nor less. Later I may turn it over to British protection. But recently it was no man's land, and as that infernal blackguard, the King of Okky, was after it, I seized it for myself."

"Hear, hear," said Carter. "As the King of Okky was

once indecently keen on adding my head to his private collection, I can never be really fond of that man, somehow."

"Confound your head, sir! That had nothing to do with it. I didn't quarrel with the man for following out his ordinary African methods. I'm going for him for letting in the French."

Carter was clearly puzzled. "What on earth have the French to do with it?"

"Exactly what they had to do with all the British West African colonies. We hold a seaboard, and when the men on the spot try to consolidate an influence in the hinterland, our Foreign Office promptly truckles to the Anti-British party at home and tells them to drop it. The Anti-British party says, 'Oh no, we mustn't make a sphere of influence there. The Germans want it, or the French have set their minds on it, or why shouldn't poor dear Portugal have a chance there? But whatever you do, don't give it to nasty, greedy Great Britain.' And unless the hand of the Foreign Office is absolutely forced, they always do as the Anti-Britishers ask. You see the Anti-British party is noisy and hysterical, and always shrieking that it can command countless votes." Mr. Smith limped across the hut and sat on a green case and emphasized his further remarks with a powder-stained forefinger.

"Well," he said, "it's an old game with me, and after all the official kicks I've had I ought to have dropped it years ago. But somehow I couldn't resist the temptation. The King of Okky is our man by geography and agreement. I have made representations to the F. O., till I am sick of putting pen to paper, that he ought to be recognized and patted on the back. They don't even take the trouble to reply, much less carry out the suggestions. Therefore the French, who have taken hold of the hinterland, have

done the obvious. They sent down a sort of fourth-rate tin-pot *sous-officier*, and told him that if he fixed up things all right for France they'd give him a commission and a 500 francs gratuity; and as he'd absolutely no competitors, he naturally did the trick."

"What a beastly shame!" Carter blurted out, and then felt surprised at himself. It was about the first time in his life that the Englishman that was within him had ever peeped out upon the surface.

"I know what the man's expedition cost—practically nothing. I saw the presents he gave old Kallee—£50 would have covered them. And for that, and a mouthful of empty words, he gets half a million square miles of territory, and trade of a present value of £100,000, and a potential value of £750,000, at a low estimate. Well, Mr. Carter, I'm braver than our F. O. I'm going to buck against the Anti-British party, and I'm going to see that we keep in our own hands what rightly belongs to us. I shall be called a pirate, but that doesn't disturb me. I lost all the reputation I had to lose at this same game years ago. I was doing my duty here then in West Africa. A smug little beast of a newspaper man got up in the House of Commons and demanded my dismissal. He would never have been heard of if he hadn't been consistently Anti-British on every occasion when the country was in disagreement with anyone else. But it was his dirty line, and it brought him a certain disgraceful notoriety, which was what he was after. He could command votes, or said he could, and the Government believed him. They didn't care particularly for England; their one interest was keeping their party in office; and as I was a nuisance, I had to go. It wasn't a case of being actually broke, you must understand, Mr. Carter, but they made things so awkward that I had to send in my papers all the same. They tried

the same game with Rhodes, and Curzon, and Milner, the dirty little curs. They hate a man who tries to uphold Great Britain's dignity or give her another acre of territory.

"But here now, thank the Lord, I personally am unofficial, and I'm doing exactly what I know to be best without fear or favor of anybody."

"How far does your territory extend, sir?"

"As far as I can make it," said Mr. Smith dryly.

"Are you going to let it be developed by the white man?"

"Assuredly."

"Then," said Carter, "we shan't clash, and I'm sure you will give me my passports. I don't know whether the place I am making for is in your territory or the next king's, but I'm going there purely for purposes of development. I tell you frankly, I haven't a bit of ambition at present beyond making a pile. If ever I find myself a rich man I may take a hand in the thankless game you are on at here. But that's in the future. In the meanwhile, if the question is not indiscreet, might one ask if it was a Frenchman you were having that rifle duel with just now?"

"The Frenchman's down with fever. I was exchanging shots with a soldier of fortune who is, I believe, an old acquaintance of yours. Kwaka his name is."

"Great Christopher! what a small place West Africa is. Old Kallee sent Kwaka down to borrow my head for his collection, and after the way I bamboozled that man I shouldn't have been surprised if he'd been struck off the Okky army list. Did you—er—make a clean job of him?"

"Winged only, I think. He kept very well to cover."

"You were both blazing away for long enough."

"Well," chuckled Mr. Smith, "I'm afraid he hardly

had a fair chance at me. You see, I'd a boy with a trade gun lying under a log a dozen yards to my right, and I'd a string from my foot to his trigger. When I loosed off the Winchester I pulled the other gun too, and Kwaka shot for the smoke every time, and made very good practice of it. That log would be worth mining for lead."

"When you take the place what shall you do with the Frenchman?"

"Just the same that he would do with me," said the old man grimly. "Now suppose we change the subject. The bush telegraphs have been persistently talking about a white woman who's been upsetting the face of Africa, especially about our factories. Heard anything of her?"

Carter laughed shortly. "Of course I've heard. In fact, she's why I'm here. She's Miss Kate O'Neill."

The old man dropped his eyeglass to the end of its ribbon, fumbled for it till he caught it again, and three times tried to screw it in place before he got it fixed. "Kate O'Neill, you say? She'd be about twenty—no, twenty-three years old?"

"I'm a bad judge, but I daresay she'd be about that. Why, do you know her, sir?"

Mr. Smith straightened himself with an obvious effort. "As I have not been to England for five-and-twenty years, is it likely? You said she was English, I think?"

"As a point of fact, I did not, though presumably she is English. She was not the late Godfrey O'Neill's real relative. She was adopted, so I heard. But he left her the business for all that, and she's making it hum. She's marvellously able. But of course you have seen for yourself more of her efforts than I have, sir."

"I have seen them?"

Carter laughed. "I'm afraid you made the same mistake that everybody else made, from Slade and old Image.

She is the K. O'Neill of the kindly-buck-up-and-get-it-done letters. She is the Mr. K. that you chaffed me about at Malla-Nulla for admiring so much as a business man."

"My God!" said Swizzle-Stick Smith, and sat back limply against the wall of the hut, and then "My God!" he said again.

Carter hesitated, and then, "Did you," he ventured, "know Miss Kate's own people before the late Godfrey took her over?"

Mr. Smith, with an obvious effort, pulled himself together. "I did, Mr. Carter. Her mother—she—she died. Her father went under. He had a pretty trying time of it first, but when the pinch came he went under most thoroughly. Godfrey O'Neill, good fellow that he was, took the child then, and so she got her chance, and, thank heaven, she's used it."

Carter looked at the old man narrowly. "And is the father alive now?"

But by this time Mr. Smith was his old cool, profane self again. "How the devil should I know? Do you think I keep track of all the failures in Africa? You seem very interested in this young woman yourself. May I ask if you've any aspirations in that direction?"

"If you mean have I any wish to marry her, I can answer that best by telling you that I'm engaged to marry Laura Slade."

"Ah, I see. Well, Mr. Carter, we will drop the subject, which is a painful one to me for many reasons. Let us get on to your personal schemes. In what way can I forward them?"

CHAPTER XV

TIN HILL: THE MINE

TIN HILL, when they got to it, carried riches that lay in full view of the sky. The mountain of country rock which held the veins reared up out of the dark green bush, red-streaked and barren, and the last day's march towards it lay through a heavy growth of rubber vines. Even the Krooboy could not help noticing these.

"O Carter," he said, "rubber lib for here. Dem Missy Kate she say rubber-palaver beat oil-palaver, an' kernels, an' gum, all-e-same cocked hat."

"She didn't. Those are my words of wisdom you've got hold of. Still I admit the sentiments are Miss O'Neill's. But the main thing is, Trouble, that rubber takes capital and labor to handle, and this firm's short of both at the moment. We'll leave rubber to Miss O'Neill for the present."

"O Carter, dem Missy Kate, she no fit for love you now?"

"She no fit," said Carter, with a sigh, "because you savvy I fit for do wife-palaver with dem Miss Laura."

The last marches of Ali ben Hoosein's road had been little travelled during these latter months of political upheaval, and this meant that the ever-growing bush had encroached, and passage was difficult. Moreover, food was painfully scarce. Swizzle-Stick Smith, out of his scanty store, had given them what he could, but this was soon eaten, and once more they had been forced to fall back on

that marvellous thing, the kola nut. But though nibbling kola puts off the desire for a meal, and makes one able to endure prolonged strains, it does not fill gaps in the inside.

Both Carter and the Krooboy were very gaunt, and tattered, and savage-looking when at last they arrived at the rock and the river; but the omens seemed to change from that moment.

To begin with, Carter had a snap-shot at a gazelle and brought it down. They lit a fire where they were, ate, and felt the blessedness of being full for the first time for a fortnight. Then, whilst hunting for a site for a hut, they came across a clump of plantains, wild certainly, and coarse, but filling enough to men who had long outgrown any niceties of palate. And at the farther side of the plantains, what appeared to be a mere cubical mound of greenery disclosed itself upon inspection to be a house.

"Ghosts," whimpered White-Man's-Trouble, and shrank back.

"I hope so," said Carter. "They'd give us local news, anyway, and might be amusing to talk to. But I never met ghosts outside a story-book, and I'm afraid there'll be none here. I wonder who lived on this spot? Stone house, with limed walls three feet six thick, and a flat cement roof. Inside area—phew! it smells musty—twenty feet by twelve. No, by Christopher! there's another room on beyond. Storeroom that—oh, beg pardon, Mr. Snake. My mistake. Good-afternoon!"

He shot out into the open again by the doorway, and several snakes who resided in the farther room made exit by the window.

"When in doubt as to the authorship of any West African monument, one always puts it down to the early Portuguese," Carter mused, "and we'll leave it at that for the present. Original occupants have been gone any time these

last two hundred years. Well, if we strip off these vines and creepers from the outside, and light fires inside to sweeten the air a bit, we shall have the most palatial quarters. The question now is whether there is a mine and whether it is worth working."

But that last point very quickly answered itself. Three great veins of tin-stone sliced vertically into the mother rock. Two of them were forty feet wide, the third was sixty. The face ran up at a steep angle, and a great beer-colored river swilled away at its foot, and undermined it, and with the help of the sun, kept chattering screees always cascading down the slope.

"This isn't a mine," Carter shouted exultantly, "it's a quarry! Bring a steamer up alongside here, and every man that works could shovel two hundred sovereigns' worth of ore into her from these dumps each hour without so much as putting a pick in. Why, the outcrops are scarcely leached at all. When we've worked twenty yards or so into the veins I'll rig a temperley transporter and guy it to these rocks above, and run the stuff straight from where it grew into a steamer's holds. Great Christopher! Kate had better look out: I'm not going to let her be the only millionaire on earth."

"Dem stones with yellow glass on him worth money?" asked White-Man's-Trouble.

"Heaps."

"In Liverpool?"

"Well, say Swansea or Cardiff; practically the same thing."

"No worth money here?"

"I'd sell you a ton for a fill of tobacco."

"How you get it to coast? You no fit to pay carriers."

"By water, my pagan friend. We make steamah lib for here."

"Steamah no fit," said the Krooboy, and spat contemptuously into the yellow stream. "Dem cappies no savvy way here. Dem ribber no savvy way to Coast."

"That's a bit beyond my linguistic powers. You must translate some more."

"Dem ribber," the Krooboy explained patiently, "no fit for run to dem sea."

"Then where the deuce does it run to? Does a Ju-ju drink it?"

"Ju-ju no fit for touch dem ribber," said White-Man's-Trouble, taking the question literally. "But dem ribber run into dem squidge-squidge, an' lib for die!"

"Runs into a swamp and gets lost! My great Christopher, the odds are you're right. But why in the name of thunder didn't you tell me that before?"

"I no savvy," said the Krooboy simply, "where you come. O Carter, I come after you from Mokki because I think you no fit for carry dem bag."

Carter swung round and picked up White-Man's-Trouble's hand and shook it heartily. "You've got a very white inside to you," he said.

But the African was not flattered. He pulled away his limp hand as soon as it was set free, and rubbed his abdomen nervously. "O Carter, I no fit for white inside. I no ju-ju boy. I dam common Krooboy."

Thence onwards there was impressed on Carter's mind these three great facts—One: He had found a mine of immense potential value. Two: He could never turn his minerals into cash unless he could find a water channel down to the Coast. And three: If he couldn't discover that channel himself no one else would, at any rate for his benefit.

He thought these matters over during one torrid night, and resolved to devote the next day to exploration. He

had had predecessors on the place, house building predecessors who had left a series of rust-streaks which he translated into mining tools. Presumably they were Europeans. How did they propose to deal with this ore? Smelt it on the spot, or bag it and get it to the Coast?

If they were West African Portuguese of the olden time, he was fully aware that they would be using slave labor for everything, and he tried to figure out if it was possible, even with slave porters, to carry concentrates down to the Coast and leave a sufficient margin for profit. Even with the most liberal estimates he could not make it so, taking into account the slow-sailing ships, the crude smelting methods, and the lower prices of the old days. Remained then the passage of the creek and river channels, and if these old Portuguese had found a waterway, why, then, so could he.

So next day he set out to hunt for a quay, or any other traces of shipping ore, or perhaps some evidences of boat-building, and he pressed his way through vine and bush, and over crag and scree, till the scorching heat had drained his lean body of moisture, and his knees zigzagged beneath him through sheer weakness and weariness.

Then he made a discovery, and sat down, and for the moment felt faint and discouraged.

He had nearly walked in onto the top of a native village.

He had been going down-wind, or the smoke of their fires would have warned him earlier. As it was, the bark of a scavenger dog gave him the first hint of the village's nearness, or he would have descended onto its roofs. It lay beneath a small bluff, and its houses so assimilated with the rest of the forest that even close at hand it was hard to pick out the human dwellings.

It was the hour of heat, when only Englishmen and dogs (according to the old libel) are wont to be abroad, and the

village slept. Even the dogs found the heat too great for wakefulness, so that only the Englishman carried an open eye. But the smell of the place advertised it as a village of fishers, and a closer scrutiny showed the harvest of the river, gutted, and strung up upon the stripped boughs of trees to dry in the outrageous sun-heat. There are always markets for these dried river fish throughout all West Africa.

Carter backed into thicker cover, and waited till the sun began once more to cast a shadow, and the village woke. First the dogs opened their eyes and began their endless scavengers' prowls. Then the children came out to play in the dust. Next the women roused to do the village work. And last of all, the men emerged from the clumps of bush, which one had to accept as huts, spear-armed all of them, and sat in the patches of purple shade, and oversaw all, to approve and direct.

"You lazy hounds," said the Englishman to himself, "I should like to set you to shoveling ore all day, and signing checks all night for your women's bonnet bills. But then," he reminded himself with a sigh, "there are some women these days who insist on working themselves, however hard you may press your services."

He reported his find to White-Man's-Trouble on his return to the old Portuguese house that evening, and that worthy was seized with his usual tremors. "O Carter," said he, "dem bushmen that live by fish-palaver fit for be worst kind of bushmen. They come here one day soon, an' they throw spear till we lib for die, an' they chop us afterwards. You savvy?" said the Krooboy, with a whimper and a shudder—"chop us after?"

"Don't try and work up my feelings over the post-mortem, because you can't do it. Once dead, what happens to my vile corpse doesn't interest me. But I don't intend

to peg out yet, especially at the hands of a pack of ignorant cannibals like these. Observe, Trouble. You have seen me practise ju-ju already?"

"I fit."

"And you have been my assistant in the black art?"

The Krooboy shuddered, but he said sturdily enough, "I fit."

"Well and good. Then to-morrow we will weave infernal charms over this pleasing spot, till no mere black man, be he cannibal or be he simple fisherman, will dare to press his sacrilegious toes upon it."

A stream of water poured over one part of the cliffs, that Carter designed hereafter for a power-plant to handle his ores. But in the meanwhile he turned it to a more immediate use. He cut wide bamboos, and fitting them into one another, formed a great pipe which would receive water and air together. With stones, and clay, and grasses he built a box to receive the air and water, and made a cunningly devised trap through which the water could escape, but not the air. Then with more bamboos he built him organ pipes and set the mouths of these in the box, so that the air should drive through them and blow a dismal note. And next, with further ingenuity he fashioned a commutating valve, also worked automatically by the water, which for a time would shut off the water, and then set it going again to thrill the air with the notes boo-paa-bumm, in ascending scale, and a minute later to reply bumm-paa-boo.

It was all extremely simple when one knew how it was done, and extremely startling to walk in upon from the depths of a primeval African forest, and the fishers of the village, when the sounds first broke in upon their nervous ears, threw themselves down upon the dust, and waited for the end of the world, which they felt sure was at hand.

To them then appeared a white man who was clothed from head to foot with garlands of dark green leaves of the rubber vine, and had on his head hair which was of the sacred color of red. He was followed by a Krooboy bearing the blue tribal mark between his brows, and having a sheaf of feathers stuck above his right ear, where the ordinary tooth-cleaning stick should have been carried. These explained in bold, clear tones that they were the chief ju-ju men of all Africa, and that the portent which was even then *boo-paa-bumm-ing* behind them was sent by powers unseen to herald their coming. But they did not represent the evil, the harmful ju-ju. If only they were treated with the profound respect which was their due they would be a beneficent influence, with a special protective eye to that village of fishers. The catch should increase, the markets widen, and peace should hem in the roads through which the villagers travelled.

"But each morning we must have an offering of fresh-caught fish," White-Man's-Trouble proclaimed, "together with the wood necessary for their cooking. (O Carter, I no fit for gather cook-wood when I ju-ju man," he explained to his companion.)

The scheme took; there was no doubt about that. Never were villagers so pleased at securing the supernatural protection, which all Africans desire, at so meagre a cost. Men, women and children, they got up from the dust, and they slobbered over the Krooboy's toes, and over the remains of Carter's canvas shoes, and to show their willingness, the men went down to the marigold-smelling river then and there to procure the wherewithal to make their initial offering.

White-Man's-Trouble scratched himself thoughtfully and looked over those that were left. "O Carter," he said, "I no fit for cook dem food when I ju-ju man. We

take with us two-three, all-e-same slaves, to be house-boy an' do dem work."

"No," said Carter shortly, "we shall do nothing of the kind."

The Krooboy stared. "Why you no fit?"

"I know what you're after, and I've got my reasons, though you wouldn't appreciate them. However, I suppose I must invent something that will appeal to you. If dem bushmen lib for house with us they soon see we no real ju-ju men, an' they tell their friends. Then their friends come up some dark night and chop us. Savvy?"

"O Carter," said White-Man's-Trouble, "you plenty-great man!"

Now there are two ways of working a mine. One is to sell it to a limited company which in return for certain concessions kindly puts up the necessary capital for development; the other way is to find the capital out of one's own private resources, and annex all the resultant profits.

But Carter had a poor opinion of the size of his own share if the first of these methods were carried out. To begin with, he knew nothing of company promoting. He would have to employ an expert, who would want the lion's share of the plunder; and indeed he quite realized that a tin mine up an unknown river in the territory of no man's land would take a powerful lot of selling even to that gullible body of mining-share purchasers of the British public. The more he thought over the limited company idea, the less chance of profits did he see in it for himself. And he wanted those profits badly. He had not risked life and health to study African scenery and customs.

On the other hand, he was at the moment absolutely penniless. If he did discover a waterway down to the coast—or rather when he had discovered that waterway,

for he was fully determined to do it—how much forwarder would he be? What steamer could he charter? None. By no means could he get one without giving up a large slice of his precious mine to the man who ran the risk. He did not blame them. He put himself in the traders' places. If he were running a down-river factory, and had a launch, and some tattered red-headed fellow came down out of the back of beyond with a wild tale about a tin mine, and asked for the loan of the launch, and promised to pay when a cargo was brought down, and sent to a smelter in England and realized upon, what would he say to such a preposterous offer? Why, he would laugh at it. The proposition was not one that any business man would entertain.

No, he must get some capital, and buy that launch. And then came the question of where was the capital to come from.

His father? Well, he was engaged to Laura, and he did not feel like going near his father.

Slade?—Smith? Neither of them had a penny.

O'Neill and Craven? That meant Kate. He started as if he had been stung at the idea of going to Kate and asking her for money. Kate was successful, and she could loan it easily. Granted, and if she had been successful so would he be, and without her help. He shook an angry fist at Africa. "Curse you, if you've given her a fortune you've got to give me one too, or I'll take it in spite of you!"

He had a touch of fever that night, and White-Man's-Trouble plied him with decoctions of herbs of such appalling nastiness that (in his own phrase) he decided to get well quickly, merely to avoid the drugs. But it was a fancy built of that fever which put him on the path of success.

He imagined that the shades of the old Portuguese, who

had built the strong stone house in those far-off days, came in that night to visit him. They were miners, too, or metal workers, he could not make out which, and they strutted about in long patched cotton stockings which reached to mid-thigh, and a combination garment of thick cloth that covered all the rest of them. Even in that stifling room, and in that baking climate, they wore metal helmets and metal body armor, and Carter wondered how they could go abroad into the sunshine and not be cooked alive in their shells.

But he did not content himself for long with this idle observation. There was a method even in his fevered dreaming. He put the question: Did they get their stuff down to the Coast on the heads of carriers? The ghosts laughed at the idea of such a thing. "Why should we go against our nature? We Portuguese—in the days when we lived, who speak to you now—we were seamen and rivermen always. So we built great flat boats and swam our goods down the rivers."

"Christopher!" said the Englishman, "there's just the tip I've been waiting for. A sort of raft. By Gee! I'm going to shake hands with you for bringing the news."

But in that hospitable attempt he was stopped by the burly White-Man's-Trouble, who sat on his chest, till he promised to lie still again.

CHAPTER XVI

THE KING'S BOUNTY

A FURTHER brilliant idea came to Carter next morning that after all he and White-Man's-Trouble had been raising difficulties about the river's navigation that were quite unnecessary. There was a village of natives close at their door who were river-farers. What was more likely than that there were many men there who could pilot a canoe through a chain of creeks till at last they heard the great Atlantic surf roaring on a river bar?

White-Man's-Trouble shook his head when he heard the suggestion. "Dem bushmen savvy nothing," said he contemptuously.

Upon experiment it proved that he was right. The villagers had acquired the habit of fishing on the reaches which ran two miles up stream and two miles down; they had adopted the customs of their forefathers; no one of them had ever paddled beyond these limits. They were an incurious people.

Their canoes were small, and narrow, and unwieldy. They were dug out from cotton-wood trees with fire, and dubbed into vague shape with native adzes, and through sheer idleness and incapacity the builders had rarely selected straight timber. Even expert polers and paddlers could not propel those miserable craft in a straight course. One thing only were these fishers good at, and that was baling. But in this they had abundant practice, for all the canoes were sun-cracked, and leaked like baskets.

"I wish," said Carter, "for a great raft that will carry twelve tons of the shiny stones which fall from the mountain."

They did not know what a raft was, neither did they appreciate the size of a ton, but Carter demonstrated to them, and White-Man's-Trouble kept them from forgetting. The Krooboy had found a chiquot, and, from having felt chiquots across all parts of his own person many a time, was well qualified to wield such a baton of authority. Carter picked out suitable cotton woods, and the Krooboy apportioned out the cutters, and stayed beside them till their work was done.

They handspiked the logs down to the water, again having to be instructed in this most elementary piece of mechanics, laid cross-pieces at right angles, and lashed all tightly together with lianes. Then when they had built up the interstices between the logs with large pieces of tinstone, they carried down the smaller ore in baskets till the logs were sunk to three-quarters draught.

Next they built a house on the raft and covered it with thatch, and in part of the house they piled a great store of dried fish as provision for the voyage. And all the while the ju-ju organ behind them boomed out at intervals its dismal *boo-paa-bumm, bumm-paa-boo*.

Now although Carter had been a trader long enough to get very African notions of the negro and his ways, still he had an Englishman's natural bias against forced labor. White-Man's-Trouble, who did not see the desirability of working if others would do it for him, openly suggested pressing what hands were required for navigation. But Carter said no. He had no money to pay them with on arrival, and the lower castes of Africans do not understand the delights of having outstanding accounts with the white man for labor performed. The Krooboy and he must

struggle down the creeks and find the channel themselves.

White-Man's-Trouble sniffed and scratched himself, and said they would see. And presently when the time came for departure the usual African surprise descended upon them surely enough. Seven naked savages from the fishers' village squatted on the raft and refused to budge. Their arguments were simple. Carter was a great ju-ju man. They knew he was great, because since he came the *boo-baa-bumm* noises had been incessant. Moreover, these were beneficent noises, since whilst they filled the air no one had died in the village from leopard, crocodile, or alien spear. They therefore adopted him as their master.

"Oh, but look here," said Carter, "I can't do this. It means I should be a slave-holder, neither more nor less. Besides, with you seven great lumps sitting there, the raft's awash. If I take you I shall have to jettison some of my tin-stone."

But they had no further arguments. They sat placid. They had lived in cousinship with fear all their squalid lives, and here at last had arrived the strong man who could certainly protect them if he would. And they intended he should.

Carter thought for a minute, and then, "I won't have it," said he. "Trouble, drive them ashore."

White-Man's-Trouble spoke, and nothing happened. He laced into their bare backs with his chiquot, but still they did not budge. One of them, who seemed to be spokesman, merely talked to him quietly.

The Krooboy explained. "Dem bushmen very uneducate. Dey say if you no take 'em dey lib for die. Dem big black fellow there wid one ear, he say if you no take him, he walk into dem ribber an' be crocodile chop."

"They'll do it, too, confound them," Carter assured himself vexedly.

And so it came to pass, as he could not very well condemn the enterprising seven to death—for that is what leaving them amounted to—he was forced to take them with him, and very idle, inefficient boatmen they proved. They knew nothing of the river, once the two miles of their fishing had been passed; they had no idea of the obvious set of currents, no eyes for the plainest shoal. If they were left to themselves for a dozen minutes they would run the raft into the bush, and as likely as not get on board a cargo of red ants that seemed to have white-hot teeth when they started to bite. They gorged upon the scanty store of dried fish if they were not watched, and never caught more unless they were incessantly goaded. When the reeking yellow river was more than usually full of crocodiles they would dangle their legs over the side; and when the raft was drifting past a village which was most probably hostile, they would break into song. They always felt that the great white ju-ju man, under whose protection they had elected to place themselves, was competent to shelter them if he so desired. And if he willed otherwise, and they died, well, that did not greatly concern them. They were very exasperating animals, and Carter about three times a day much wished that the handling of them could be transferred to some of those kind-hearted people at home who always insist that the negro of the West Africa hinterland is a man and a brother.

They had a small dugout canoe in tow, and greatly they needed it. After twice running the big raft down streams that ended in impassable morass, and having tediously to tow and punt her back against the current, they always hereafter sent the lighter craft ahead on voyages of discovery. Or to be more accurate, Carter had to go in her with one of the fishers as assistant. The excellent White-Man's-Trouble had limits to his intelligence, and there

was no driving into him that water which would carry a canoe that drew three inches of water was too shallow for a heavy raft that drew three feet.

The Winchester rifle and the remains of the Gladstone bag seemed the only two things that linked them now with civilization. They lived in the African manner upon African food; the intricate branching of the creeks was charted in matchet-scratches upon the smoothed surface of a log of wood; even English speech was discarded in favor of the native tongue.

Carter had shaved till the steamy atmosphere of the bush had turned his razors into mere sticks of rust; and with the growth of his red stubble of beard, all respect for his outward man had vanished. He caught sight of himself one evening in a pool of black water. "Well," he commented, "I always thought that Swizzle-Stick Smith was a filthy old ruffian, but at his worst he looks a prince to me now. That I suppose is where gray has the pull over ginger."

But it was the rescue of the King of Okky which really gave the turn to the whole of Carter's fortune. They had got the raft into a regular cul-de-sac of reeds and water-lilies, and she lay there stuck on a shoal in the face of a falling river. Creeks radiated all around them like the spokes of some gigantic wheel. The place was alive with crocodiles and flies. Not very far away an intertribal battle advertised itself by an ugly mutter of firing.

"An' chop no lib," said White-Man's-Trouble, by way of winding up the sum of their difficulties.

"Well, find some," Carter snapped. "Make spears, and stab the fish up out of the mud if you can't catch them with nets or hooks. Only see that there's a meal ready for me when I get back, or I'll lam into you with that chiquot you're so fond of using."

He went off then in the warped dugout, with the one-eared man as bow pole, laboriously hunting for a passage into some main stream. The river beneath them gave up fat bubbles of evil odors; the banks of slime on either side reeked under the sun blaze. A dozen times Carter thought he saw open water ahead, and pushed on, and a dozen times found himself embayed. And always he had to jot down compass notes with a nail on the well-scored gunwale of the canoe, so as to keep in touch with the raft, and be ready against that forthcoming time when he would have to pilot a steam launch up to Tin Hill. For though he barely expected to escape with life out of this horrible labyrinth of creeks and waterways, be it always understood he intended to return and demand from the country a fortune, if so be he ever got down again to the seaboard.

At last, however, he swung out into what was obviously a main channel, and was on the point of turning back to fetch the raft, when his eye was held by something that moved sluggishly in mid-stream.

It lay up towards the sun, and was hard to make out because of the dazzle of radiance.

"Can you see what that is?" he asked his bow man in the native.

"It is just a man on a branch," said that savage, with cheerful indifference. "Presently the crocodiles will chop him. Shall we go back now, Effendi, to the raft?"

"No, my callous friend. We'll investigate the person in the tree first. Full speed ahead!"

The clumsy dugout lurched and twisted down the broad marigold-smelling river, and as there was a strong current under her, she soon drew the obstruction into clearer view.

It was a tree clearly enough, swept down by some flood and stranded here in mid-channel to form one of the myriad snags with which West African rivers abound. In

it was a black man who hung by his hands from the upper branches, and was perpetually pulling up his toes like some ridiculous jumping-jack. He was a very fat man, and his movements were getting more feeble even as they watched him. But it was not till they got close alongside that they saw the impelling motive of these gymnastics.

A twelve-foot crocodile was in attendance beneath the tree, and every now and again it swam up with a great swirl and shot its grisly jaws out of the water, and snapped noisily at the fat man's toes.

Carter lifted his Winchester and waited for a chance, but of a sudden his bow man turned to him with a face that was gray with fear. "That man," he said, "is the King of Okky, and if you save him, presently we shall both die."

"I had already recognized the gentleman, and I fancy he's far more my enemy than yours, but I'm going to pull him out of this mess for all that, and give him a good level start again on dry land."

Then as the crocodile jumped once more, he threw up his rifle and shot it under the left foreleg, where the protective plates are absent.

The brute jumped, and writhed, and swam away amid cascades of golden spray, and as the bullet was soft-nosed and expanding there would probably be, before many more hours were over, one less pest in Africa. But Carter did not worry his head about that. He paddled the dugout to the tree and called to the King.

His Majesty of Okky was fat, and though once he had been a giant in strength, in these latter years of kingship he had grown soft and flabby. He did all his journeyings in hammock and canoe, and had slaves who saved him the smallest scrap of exercise; and, moreover, he ate and drank to vast excess. So that when the immediate strain was



Then, as the crocodile jumped once more, he threw up his rifle and shot it under the left foreleg, where the protective plates are absent. Page 234.



over it can be understood how he hung in the upper branches of that tree too limp and exhausted even to lower himself into the canoe. Carter had to climb onto the branch, and bear a hand before he could get down.

The dugout sank perilously beneath his weight, but the King was no amateur, and balanced cannily. Moreover, presently he panted himself into articulate speech. "I fit for gin," said the King of Okky.

"I bet you are," Carter agreed. "But unfortunately the bar on this packet's closed for want of supplies just at the moment. Try a sup of the local ditch-water out of the baler."

The King did so, and made a face. "I have not drunk water since I became a King," said he. "O Carter, do not turn up stream. I have men at a village down yonder."

"I don't doubt it. But having saved your skin, King, I've my own to think of now."

The King's great body began to shake with laughter.

"Stop that," said Carter sharply, "or you'll burst the gunwales out."

"O Carter," said Kallee, speaking in Okky, "listen. It is only by my favor that you have lived so long. We are both ju-ju men, and between such it is useless to make pretence. But I can tell you all you did since you left Mokki, and met Smith, and went to the cliff whereof ben Hossein told you, and saw the stones which carry the brown glass which you covet so much. I can tell you of your machine which says *boo-paa-bumm*, and of the way you came down these creeks on a raft, and how you labored prodigiously in the blind channels. I had arranged to let you get so far. To-morrow, when you came abreast of my villages, canoes would have come out—" Here the King screwed round his fat neck and eyed Carter over his shoulder—"O Carter, do you think it strange that I should have wanted a head such as yours?"

"You would not tell me this now if you still wanted that head."

One could not deny that somehow the man had a certain regal dignity about him. "O Carter," he said, "if I have a King's lusts, I have all of a King's gratitude. I was travelling down this river. My canoe was overturned by a snag, and it and the paddlers were swept away down stream, and if the crocodiles have not dealt with the men I will give them their due presently. For myself, I climbed into that tree as you saw, and could not have endured longer. What account was open between us we will wipe from the tally. I owe you for my life now, and I will repay."

"Are my Krooboy and the fishers included in the treaty?"

The King shrugged his great shoulders. "I could give you a better servant than White-Man's-Trouble, and better paddlers than those fishermen. But if they please you, they shall remain alive and well treated. Paddle now quickly down stream to the village, O Carter, and we will drink Krug champagne till a goat is slain and chop prepared."

The village, when they came to it, was not a pleasant sight. It had been rebellious, and the King of Okky had been instilling discipline with a strong hand. Furthermore, two of his canoemen had escaped from the river and reported that the King was drowned. They were also attended to in a way that prevented their ever erring again in this world. The King dispensed champagne, and arranged great matters of life and death with a massive impartiality. And between whiles he found abundant time to talk with his guest, now using Coast English for the sake of greater privacy. His knowledge of what had been going on was at times almost uncanny.

"O Carter," he said, "dem Laura, she lib for Teach-palaver house in Las Palmas."

"She left for Las Palmas in the *Frau Pobst* certainly. But I don't know where she is staying."

"Teach-palaver house," said the King placidly, "by Telde."

"She was at school once at a convent on the Telde road."

"She lib for there now."

"I say, King, how the deuce do you know that?"

"Savvy plenty funny things," said the King, and turned to do justice on another culprit who was brought before him for trial.

The royal *ménage* was simple. They dined off a cous-cousoo and a bowl of stewed goat, such as any well-to-do native farmer might have set on the floor before him for his meal, and thereafter they sat on mats of elaborate straw-work upon the hard earth, and the King consumed at a moderate computation one ounce of snuff before he was inclined for further talk.

Then, "O Carter," said he, "what for dis stone palaver?"

"When that stone is taken to my country they heat it in a furnace with other things, and a white metal runs out."

"Okky-man no fit for make him?"

"No, the job's too complicated."

"Dem stone worth lot o' money, or you no fit for carry small-small load all dem way to coast. And a whole hill of dem stone lib far up ribber. So dem hill worth plenty-much lot o' money."

"There goes my pile," thought Carter bitterly. "The greedy old ruffian's going to hook it for himself."

The King went on. "Dem Kate, she fit for be O'Neill and Craven now?"

"I suppose you may say she is."

"Smith an' Slade all-e-same work-boy for O'Neill and Craven?"

"If you like to put it that way."

"Good. And you," went on this well-informed monarch, wagging a fat forefinger, "you want marry Kate, same's I wanted to marry Laura, an' she no fit for have you, same's Laura no fit for have me dem time?"

Carter dropped his chin onto his knees and said nothing. The King went on, "O Carter, you fit for save my life dis day. If you no come wid dem canoe, I lib for be crocodile chop this minute. So I do not take your red—I do not make you lib for die as I say dis morning, but I fit for make you glad. Dem Dutchmen hold dem factory now at Mokki?"

"They do."

"Then I send my war-boys in at back an' stop roads. But I take ju-ju off roads to dem O'Neill and Craven factories at Smooth, an' Monk, and Malla-Nulla."

"That's very good of you, I'm sure."

"Then dem Kate she love you much when she find dem factory once more do trade."

"I'm afraid, King, it would take a lot more than that to make Kate feel attached to me. You see, I'm no longer in O'Neill and Craven's service. I chucked it when she sold Mokki, and I've been on my own ever since."

The King's eyes gave the ghost of a twinkle. "Den I no fit for open dem roads. So I make you dash another way. I send you for Coast in big canoe of sixty paddles."

"With White-Man's-Trouble?"

"Wid your boy, an' your cargo. I send you in three days' time six more canoes of sixty paddles, full of dem stone you wish. I dash you dem hill of stone where you set up dem dam ju-ju *boo-paa-bumm*. I tell dem men who lib for ribber banks that you be free for come an' go on all

my country while I lib for King; an' if any man he hurt you, I take dem man an' I nail him by hands an' feet to a tree!"

Carter looked up. "Do you mean that?"

The King took snuff. "When I say to a man you lib for die, he die. When I say 'I let you lib,' then he lib. When I say to a man, 'I make you dash,' he get dem dash, even though I have to send my war-boys to take it from somebody other to give it him. O Carter, I lib for be real King."

"You mean you've given me a fortune in return for the small thing I did for you?"

"My life," said the King dryly, "he seem small thing to you. But to me"—he patted his rotundity—"to me dem life be plenty big."

Three days Carter abode in the village, and kept to the inside of his hut to avoid the sights of the place, which to a European eye are unpleasant when an African King is visiting his displeasure upon unruly subjects. He was ministered unto by White-Man's-Trouble, who paid him much unaccustomed deference, and forebore to steal the smallest thing. And at nights he sat with the King, who had an educated palate in champagne, and drank vintage wine at the rate of one case in four days.

"When I lib back for Okky City," the King said once, "you fit for come and see me there now?"

"Certainly, King, if you'll name a date when you haven't got a custom on."

King Kallee looked thoughtfully at his guest. "Dem English no fit for like dem custom-palaver?"

"They don't, one little bit."

"For why?"

"Gets on their nerves."

"Dem English King, he send his war-boys if I make dem custom-palaver more?"

CHAPTER XVII

KATE SENDS A CABLEGRAM

Now to give Carter full due, his weaning of the King of Okky from the habit of human sacrifice had been brought about more by accident than design. By a further working of the law of chance, the circumstance brought him out of modest obscurity into a very strong notoriety in a little less than six short months.

"A private trader," so ran the gist of the newspaper leaders, "has brought to pass a thing which Government authorities, both civil and military, not to mention missionaries and miscellaneous philanthropists, have been trying for ineffectually ever since the British rule was set up in West Africa. Throughout all our possessions on that sickly Coast the natives have been addicted to human sacrifice; and when instances of this from time to time leak out, civilization is on each occasion chilled with a fresh douche of horror. The West African Kingdom of Okky, though little known for other qualities, has acquired a certain detestable celebrity for these red orgies. . . . Mr. Carter, though he was brought up in his father's vicarage in Wharfedale, has not been noted heretofore for any special benevolence in dealing with native questions. Those who know him describe him as essentially a strong man. . . . In fact, Mr. Carter, in his modesty, most emphatically disclaims any such high motives, and avers that he took his now celebrated journey into the bush merely for his own business purposes, and nothing beyond. On

this subject we prefer to hold our own opinions. Explorers of his rare type—the almost unknown type that does not advertise—carry with them a modesty that delights in belittling its own triumphs. But even Mr. Carter's modesty cannot explain away certain cold facts. The King of Okky till recently had a most black reputation for human sacrifice. Many Europeans have gone up to his horrible city to expostulate. Some he has sent back; some have not been heard of again since they left the Coast, and one can only shudder and guess at their fates; but none have effected any change. The 'Customs,' as these orgies of slaughter are named locally, still endured: indeed, evidence clearly showed that they were increasing under the present reign of King Kallee both in frequency and importance. Nothing, it was said by those on the spot, but a British army, and a great outlay in life and treasure, could bring these horrors of the hinterland to a close. Mr. Carter, however, thought otherwise. He went up country practically unattended. He bearded the king in his own fetich grove, and he achieved what experts called the impossible. He has induced King Kallee to abandon human sacrifice now and for always.

"As will be seen by the two interviews which appear in our news columns, the information on these points did not come from Mr. Carter himself. Mr. Carter is that man so rare to find in these pushing days, a man who does not care one jot for anything the press can do towards his own self-advancement, a man, moreover, who does not mind saying so in strong, rude Anglo-Saxon. But fortunately we have another mine of information more easily tapped. The sensational rise into a new prosperity of the old West African firm of O'Neill and Craven has been one of the features of the year's finance, and it is now an open secret that the sole partner and manager of the 'firm' is a

young, attractive, and unmarried lady. This Miss Kate O'Neill has so far evaded the interviewer, but on the Okky topic she has volunteered the fullest information. It is to her that we are indebted for our description of Mr. Carter and his great achievement."

On such lines ran the leaders in most of the great newspapers, though, of course, they varied in their facts and their point of view. They all paid graceful compliments to the pretty girl who had appeared of late with such success in the field of larger finance. One paper alone had the impudence to refer in cold print to a matter that the other newspaper men smiled over quietly in the privacy of their offices.

"We wish," wrote this sentimental journalist, "that we could indicate a romance that would finish up this episode fittingly. But truth compels us to record that Miss O'Neill, along with the rest of the biographical matter which she so kindly supplied, mentioned the detail of Mr. Carter's engagement to a Miss Laura Slade, who at present resides in Grand Canary. We understand that a marriage will shortly take place."

As it happened, this journal was the one of Mrs. Craven's daily reading. She indicated the paragraph with a prim forefinger, and called her niece to read it.

"Did you say that, Kate, or is it one of the fellow's impudent inventions?"

"Oh, I told him that with the rest just to—well, to quiet him. He seemed to think I was very interested in Mr. Carter."

"And I suppose suggested you were in love with him?"

"Well, he didn't put it exactly like that," said Kate thoughtfully. "He was a very dashing young man, and rather gave me the idea that he wanted to see if the coast was clear for himself."

"I see. And so you told him about the engagement between Mr. Carter and Laura, just to encourage him?"

"I suppose so. He really was very amusing and pushing. He wanted me to go out to lunch with him there and then."

"Kate, are you going to let Mr. Carter marry Laura?"

"My dear Aunt Jane, what an extraordinary question! What possible influence can I have over either of them? I offered them both a wedding present, and asked them each what they would like. Could I go further than that?"

"And each of them," suggested the old lady, "said 'there was time enough for that,' or they'd 'let you know when the wedding day was fixed,' or put you off, somehow, like that."

"Look here, Aunt, what are you driving at?"

"I am looking."

"Well, speak, you irritating old person."

"My dear, I am waiting for you to look back at me. You have carefully avoided meeting my eye ever since I showed you the paper."

Kate looked up, and Mrs. Craven read something in the girl's face that made her sigh. "You will go your own way, I know, Kitty dear. You are very capable, and very clever, and that has naturally made you very self-reliant. You have shown yourself so wonderfully successful over your business matters that I shouldn't dream of advising you there. But do you ever bring up into mind that there is something more in life than mere financial success?"

"Of course I do, Aunt. But I suppose I am different from the other girls. They look forward to their domestic pleasures. I have made myself other interests."

The old lady shook her head decisively. "You are not at all abnormal in that way. You are the most entirely

human person I ever saw. And to prove it, I'll just instance to you the way you've fallen in love with George Carter."

"I refuse to admit it."

"Even to me, Kitty?"

"Even to myself. I like the man, and there it must end. He is engaged elsewhere, and if you call me human, you must allow me pride. I run after no man, nor do I lure any man away from another girl who has been my friend, whatever my inclinations may be. And now, if you please, we will drop that subject and talk of rubber. Our third company was subscribed once and a half times over by lunch time to-day, and we've closed the lists. How's that for a real solid triumph?"

Mrs. Craven lay back in her chair and methodically folded the paper. "Do the profits on that bring up your score to the million you arrived at?"

"Oh no, no. But they will help it along very nicely."

"When you get a million will you stop?"

"When I get my million, which, mark you, Aunt, is more than any girl of my age has ever done, why, then, I shall start to make my second. It's a most fascinating amusement."

"But it doesn't make you happy. You are no better for it. You can't spend it."

"My dear Aunt, where have your eyes been? Haven't you seen my clothes since I came back from the Coast? Why, I never knew what it was to dress before. I'm seriously thinking I shall have to start a maid to look after me."

"My dear, you've a knack of carrying clothes."

"That I learned from you, you extremely smart person."

"Well, you got the knack somewhere, and you always were nicely turned out. Now I know your wardrobe as

well as you do yourself, and, let me see"—Mrs. Craven took a pencil from her chatelaine, and made calculations on the edge of a newspaper—"Since you came back to England you've not spent, at a liberal estimate, above two hundred and twenty-seven pounds ten on your own adornment."

Kate laughed. "I give in to you, Aunt. I quite believe you know my wardrobe better than I do myself. Well, perhaps I shall buy pearls, then. I never had one, but I believe I'm prepared to adore a necklace of big, smooth, delicately graded pearls, with shimmery skins, and a fat, pear-shaped black pearl drop to dangle below it. Yes, that's the real reason I'm making money, Aunt—to buy and wear great ropes of pearls. Or, who knows, I may have a fancy for a peer. Now, with a million, I'm told one can buy for marrying purposes a really fine specimen of peer."

"There are moments," said Mrs. Craven sharply, "when I'm very sorry you're grown up."

Kate went across and sat on the arm of the old lady's chair. "Do you want to smack me and put me to bed?"

"I've done it many a time when you've been in this mood."

"Can you see the black dog on my shoulder?"

"Larger than ever. Kate, you should try and control yourself."

"Oh, be just, Aunt. I didn't lie down on the floor and kick or do anything like that."

"No, thanks to me you can keep your temper under more decent control now. Now, don't you kiss me, and think I'm a silly old woman, and try to get round me that way—I know exactly how you're feeling. Oh, you'd lead any man a dance who married you."

"I'm certain I should," said Kate cheerfully, "unless

he was the right one. But, Auntie dear, don't you think it would be safer not to press me to marry anyone at all? I give you my word for it that there's no one marriageable I want to marry. And if you leave me alone with my other amusement, that keeps me out of worse mischief."

At the Prince's Park house in the old days there had been a room known as the Master's study. It had no books in it whatever, because the excellent Godfrey disliked books. It had a writing-desk certainly, but never even an inkpot on it to indicate use. There was just a card-table and some early Victorian furniture of hard, uncompromising ugliness. In short, it was not the Master's study at all, but it emphatically was his card-room.

It remained in its original state till Kate's return from the Coast, and then she begged it from her Aunt, who gave it gladly.

"I want a place where I can type a letter," Kate had said, "and have a copying press, without going down to Water Street. They begin to stare at me down there, and I hate it. No one objects to a girl being in business if she is merely a clerk, but if she gets hold of big successes, well, the men aren't nice about it. If I find it answers, I may lay on a secretary."

So she emptied the room and furnished it afresh, and Mrs. Craven's heart warmed as she saw the girl's natural craving for a home express itself in chairs and pictures, in pretty wall hangings and dainty carpets, in graceful flower-bowls, and all those little touches of domesticity which are the mysterious outcome of sex. There was, it turned out, a small box-room alongside, which was never used, and which could be linked up by a door knocked through the wall. This could be the secretary's room, and hold the letter files, and the copying press, and the typewriter, and all the other crude machinery of commerce;

and so "Miss Kate's room," as it came to be called, fulfilled in appearance little enough of its original intention of office.

One can hardly associate walls panelled in rose-pink brocade with the much-abused art of company promotion. But Kate sat in that pretty room, and thought out there all those tremendous schemes, which brought her such brilliant success. She felt she had retired from the firing line; she schemed and planned in secure cover outside the battle; and when any idea eluded her for too long she went out and drove her motor car, or played golf, till the idea arrived. In the season she sometimes went away on butterfly-hunting trips. At the same time she had great ideas of buying an estate where she could have a private golf course of her own. She had grown so strangely sensitive to stares these days, and, people said, unsociable. Her engagement to Mr. Austin had been broken off long ago, and to tell the truth Austin was well enough pleased to be rid of her. Africa, he felt, had eliminated from her all the points which beforetime had caught his admiration. And then again she was so enormously rich one could not, he told himself, marry a woman with such an unwieldy amount of riches. At least he could not. Nor did he intend that the future Mrs. Austin, if ever there was one, should have more practice in high finance than was necessary to manage her own accounts and the household weekly bills.

In fact, it was over this question that he flattered himself had come their split. She had given him, to be sure, a pretty broad hint that day on the landing stage, but the actual rupture of their engagement had not come till a week later, and Kate was clever enough to make Mr. Austin think that the idea was his and his alone. Still they had parted on excellent terms, and any service, professional or otherwise, that Austin could render her in the future was

one that he should look forward to, as he promised, most keenly.

"Though you cannot see your way to be my husband," she had said to him lightly, "you will still upon occasion act as my solicitor?"

"Let's call it 'friend,' Kate," he had answered, and they parted on that.

But that day, after Aunt Jane had showed her the Carter leader in the paper, Kate went to her room, and somehow her thoughts went back to Henry Austin. She tried to analyze why she had ever got engaged to him. As far as she could define it, a sort of empty space, a partial vacuum, had come into her life, and Austin appeared, and in a tentative way seemed to fill it. Now that he was gone, the vacuum returned. It did not exactly ache, but it caused a vague discomfort that annoyed her, and when she demanded a cure, something within her kept repeating, "Carter, Carter, Carter!"

She resented this clamor. She told herself that she was a strong woman. She refused to have her hand forced. She declined to allow an ex-employe of her own to be forced into her life as its only complement. And still that inner something, with irritating persistency, kept repeating, "Carter, Carter," and then got unpleasantly familiar, and began to murmur: "George."

She stood it for an hour, stood for that time persistent, inward voices urging her, with never a falter, to one narrow course, and then she got up from her great cushioned chair and went to an old Sheraton bureau. Only one narrow drawer in it was locked, and she carried the key of that amongst the charms on her watch-bangle. She opened the drawer and took from it a photograph.

It was only a steamer group, crudely taken by an amateur on a kodak film, a very imperfect thing at its best,



She gazed her fill on this very crude presentment of George Carter. Page 251.



and mottled now by the persistent West African mildew. A piece of brown paper with a hole in it was in the same drawer, a mask so cut that it blocked out all of the group except one individual. She fitted this into place and gazed her fill on this very crude presentment of George Carter.

Well, at any rate he was not a handsome man. But there was something about even this indifferent photograph that gave her a great thrill. It touched some inward chord that no other power on earth could set into vibration, and she was discomforted thereby.

The gong went for dinner. She ignored it. A servant came presently—she had added to the number of servants at the Prince's Park house and Mrs. Craven accepted the alteration passively—and the servant most respectfully stated that dinner would be served in ten minutes, and was not Miss Kate going up to dress? But Miss Kate was busy and would have a cup of tea and a sandwich.

Mrs. Craven below got the news, smiled grimly, and ate an extremely good dinner. She felt a fine satisfaction in having set to work exactly the right influences which would bring that ridiculous Kitty to her senses.

But upstairs, in the prettiest room in Liverpool, Kate wrestled with Fate. She pictured the man that the mask singled out of the group: Red hair, a dogged jaw, ill-cut clothes, and, upon occasion, a man who used the language more fitted to an underpaid stevedore. She had overheard Carter discoursing to the factory at large that night of the false alarm at Mokki, when he chided the Portuguese and the factory boys in phrases learned from Swizzle-Stick Smith. Was this the man she had ever fancied for a husband? No, a thousand times no.

She locked the group and the mask once more into its drawer, and went back to her cushions and a novel. There was still another great rubber company on the brink of

flotation. This time the pugilistic Mr. Smith had procured for her the grant of the land, and had assured her that the King of Okky, thanks to his recent improvement in morals, would see that the title remained unchallenged. The proposition was, she honestly believed, commercially sound, but the risk lay in the British Public. Were they loaded up with rubber stock? That was the point to decide. So far she had not had a share of her companies underwritten, in spite of abundant and pressing offers. But here was an awkward question to decide: Should she insure this issue, or should she risk having it not taken up, and invite a fiasco?

She tried with cold logic to reason out the arguments for, and against, and to strike a balance between them. But for once her brain refused to act. Even the novel, which she read and did not absorb, did not offer her the necessary hint. It was an old trick of hers, this reading of a dozen chapters of weak fiction, to get an inspiration, and so far it had never failed her. She was an omnivorous novel reader. She went through quite two-thirds of the fiction brought out annually by British publishers, and could never, next morning, have passed the easiest examination in a novel she had read the night before. But all her clever business ideas were evolved when she was reading these paltry books.

At last she could endure the vague things that oppressed her no longer. She dropped the book on the floor. And then she got up and went into the secretary's narrow room next door. She found cable forms and sat at a table. Then she wrote glibly enough this message.

"Burgoyne, Monk River, West Africa. Forward this to Cascaes Mokki special runner want you act our agent Las Palmas 2,400 commence cable acceptance or refusal, O'Neill."

She counted up the words, laid down her pencil, and laughed. "At any rate," she said, "that will give one a chance. And George was fool enough to think that Mr. Cascaes was running after me. Oh, I have no patience with men who can't see further through the fog than that."

CHAPTER XVIII

CARTER MAKES A PURCHASE

It was Captain Image returning red and wrathful from an unsuccessful cargo foray amongst the southern and eastern factories that Carter met the day after his arrival at the Coast. The mariner had heard of the deal at Mokki, and felt personally affronted that a nest of cargo which he had already looked upon as his own should have been handed over once more to the Germans.

"So you're on the beach, are you," said he, looking Carter up and down with vast disapproval. "I must say you look it. I've seen old Swizzle-Stick Smith come down after a jaunt in the bush and I thought he couldn't be beat for general shagginess and rags. But you give him points. What did Miss Kate bounce you for?"

"I believe I resigned."

"Same thing. And now you've come to ask me to take you home as a distressed British subject, I suppose. Well, Carter-me-lad, a deck passage is your whack according to consular understanding, but you've sat in my chart house and you've sent me cargo, and so I'm going to put my hand in my own breeches pocket and take you home in the second class. And I tell you what: Chips and the bo's'n have got a shop in the foc's'le that I'm not supposed to know about, and if you care to go in there and get enough rig out to see you home, I'll foot the bill."

"You're very good——"

"I know I am. It puts me about five weeks further off

that hen farm outside Cardiff that I want to retire onto, being good like this. There, run away out of this chart house, me-lad, and tell the chief steward to give you a square blow-out of white-man's chop one-time. I'm sure you need it. I never saw a man with so much of the lard stewed off him."

Carter laughed. "Will you let me slip a word in? I've cargo for you."

"What! You!"

"I'm afraid you won't hook much commission out of it, Cappie, as you'll have to take it at ballast rates."

"Catch me."

"But there'll be about seventy tons of it as far as I can reckon."

"My Christian Aunt! do you tell me, Carter-me-lad, that you've scratched up seventy tons of cargo? Here, sit down. No, sit down. Don't talk. I'm not going to have you going away and calling the *M'poso* a dry ship."

Captain Image had no tariff rate for tin ore, but he invented one with great readiness, and then knocked off ten per cent. by way of encouraging a new industry. "Now, where is this mine of yours?" he asked genially. "Tell me, and I warrant I'll find you an easier way to bring your produce than paddling it in dugouts."

"Up the river."

"Well, let's look at your charts, me-lad."

Carter shook his head.

"Why, how's that? Haven't you made one?"

"Oh, I've made one right enough, but it's inside my skull and out of public view."

"H'm," said Image. "Don't want any competitors, eh, Carter-me-lad?"

"Why should I?"

"Well, drink up, and let me fill your glass. Here, have another squirt of bitters."

"No, thanks, Cappie, no more. I drank enough champagne with the King of Okky to last me months. I've got a lot of big business ahead of me and I want a clear head. Now, if you take this consignment of tin ore home for me, and rob me as little as you can help over freight, what's next? Swansea and a smelter, I suppose?"

"They're a bit Welsh down in Swansea," said Captain Image, who came from Cardiff himself. "They'll do with a trifle of looking after. What you want's a smart agent."

"The thing I want first and soonest is cash. Now, look here, Cappie, you know Swansea, and you're fond, by the Coast account, of a bit of commission. Well, here's a nice lump of it on offer. If you'll get some smelter firm to buy this parcel of ore on assay, and pay cash for it, I'll give you five per cent. on what you raise."

"It's a deal. You couldn't have come to a better man, Carter-me-lad. I'll open you an account at the Bank of West Africa——"

"And get the whole balance cabled out here?"

"I was going to suggest that," said Captain Image, doubtfully, "if you hadn't rushed me so. But you won't want the lot. Now, with fifty pounds or so——"

"I want every sixpence. Man, do you think I'm going to nibble at my cake now it's been given me? Kallee's straight, I firmly believe. But what's his life worth?"

Captain Image shook his head. "Very heavy drinker even for a danky, and of course he hasn't a white man's advantages in knowing the use of drugs."

"Besides, there are the usual risks of kings and of Africa. He's put down the local anarchist. He cooked the only two who tried to assassinate him, and took a day about it over slow fire, and that discouraged the breed in Okky. But still there are risks. So that altogether he's not a good life, and if he was to go out, it's quite on the

cards his heirs, successors, and assigns might not recognize my title."

"You're right, me-lad. What you've got to do is to rip the guts out of that mine at the biggest pace possible, and I'll bring in the *M'poso* round here to load every time I come along the Coast."

Carter nearly laughed. He knew the capacity of his mine—quarry, it was, rather—and the hold space of the little *M'poso*. Tin was wavering about just under £176 per ton just then; he had reckoned that he could produce for £10 a ton; and the more profit he could get, the more pleased he would be. But he was not afraid of bringing down the price; he had plenty of margin for a cut. His only fear was that the river road might be stopped before he had made his fortune. And he intended to empty the veins of Tin Hill at the highest speed that all the strained resources of Africa were capable of, and if necessary to keep three steamers the size of the little *M'poso* ferrying his riches across to the markets. But he did not let out any word of this to Image. If the locality and the enormous wealth of this mine were to leak out, nothing could prevent a rush. At the existing moment he was penniless, and in any great influx of capital and men must inevitably be swamped. Secrecy was essentially his game for the present.

So he accepted Captain Image's proposal in the spirit in which it was made, and then put forward feelers for a steam launch. Was there such a thing already on the Coast that one could pick up cheap just then?

Captain Image lit a thoughtful pipe. "I don't know of any little steamboat that you could buy just now out here, cheap or dear. There are one or two in Sarry Leone, certainly, but they are all either too big for your job or too tender to bring round the Coast."

"I'm a bit of mechanic, you know. I wouldn't mind nursing engines. My boy, White-Man's-Trouble, too, would make, according to his own account, a pretty decent second engineer."

"Oh, I know him. Used to be stand-by-at-crane boy on the *Secondee*, and stole everything that wasn't nailed down. But you'd never get one of those Sarry Leone wrecks round here without being drowned in the process. I tell you what, though. D'ye know anything about motor cars, me lad?"

"Why?" asked Carter, who had never handled one in his life.

"Because at Dutton and Maidson's factory at Copper River they've got an old wreck of an oil launch, if she hasn't rotted and sunk at moorings, that you could have cheap."

"Everything cheap is dear to me just now. I haven't a penny in my pocket. But what do you mean by cheap?"

"Well, she certainly wasn't out in the river the last three times I called, but I did hear they'd hauled her up a creek. But if she hasn't sunk at moorings, and the ants haven't walked off with her, I should think you could get the bits that rust couldn't eat for three ten-pound notes."

"Does she burn gasolene?"

"No, ordinary canned paraffin. I know that was supposed to be the great point about her when she was brought out. Only trouble was, she didn't seem to be an amateurs' boat at all, and after the first week or so there wasn't a soul in the factory that could get her to steam at all. So they tied her up to a buoy and did their business in the old dugouts and the surf boats as formerly."

"I wonder if the old chief has got an emery wheel down in your engine room?"

Captain Image stared at this change of subject, and ran

a finger round inside his collar to shift the perspiration. "What do you want an emery wheel for? Sharpen your wits on?"

"No, my razor. If I go and try and buy a motor launch with this red wool on my chin, they'll take me for the wild man down from the back of beyond and stick up the price."

"Quite right. You've a very sound business mind, Carter-me-lad. You can, I believe, get a very sound thing in razors for a shilling at that fo'c'sle shop if Chips is still keeping one, and whilst I was buying I should get a bottle or two of Eno, if I were you. Capital thing to keep your liver down to gauge."

"I want to get all these things," said Carter emphatically. "I daresay, indeed, I should like to buy up practically the whole of Chips' remaining stock, partly for my own use and partly to take up country. But the fact still remains unaltered that until I can get an advance against bills of lading, I am without a copper in my pocket. I suppose that greedy hound Balgarnie is the man to see about finance, though."

"He is a greedy hound, Carter-me-lad, between you and me. Let me fill up your glass. No, don't put your hand across it. Well, I'll finish the bottle if you won't. You're open, just as a matter of form, to giving a lien on that cargo you're shipping? Just as a matter of form, of course, in case you peg out before things can be squared up?"

"Certainly, and I'm willing to give five per cent. per month for the accommodation."

"Oh, come now, me-lad, ten per cent.'s the usual. But I don't want to be stiff with an old friend like you, so we'll call it seven and a half." Captain Image went to the drawer under the chart table and unlocked it. "Come, now, say what you want. Anywhere up to fifty pounds."

"I couldn't possibly do with less than a hundred," said Carter definitely, and with that they began openly to wrangle. But it turned out that Captain Image, even with the help of his financial partner, Mr. Balgarnie, could only raise seventy-four sovereigns, and with that the other had to be content. He gave his bond, and stood at the head of the *M'poso's* ladder ready to go back to his boat. But Captain Image with genuine hospitality dragged him back.

"I'm not going to let you go like this, me lad. I've one turkey left in the refrigerator, and if you peg out afterwards up those beastly rivers, I'd always like to think I'd stood you one good dinner when the chance came in my way. Come now, Carter-me-lad; turkey-chop? There's not another skipper on the Coast that would make you an offer like that."

Carter laughed and gave in, and turned towards the flesh-pots. He did not like turkey. Once in Upper Wharfedale his father had come home from Skipton with thirty turkey poults, which the family reared with very vast care, and thereafter had to eat. Turkey once per annum is a luxury; twice cloy; but thirty times, when legs follow breast, and wings are succeeded by side-bones, would weary any man living. But by custom in West Africa, turkey from a steamer's refrigerator is the height of luxury, and Carter recognized the hospitable motive.

Captain Image, when mellowed by food and wine that night, talked of Miss Kate O'Neill, and Carter behind an elaborate indifference listened with a hungry interest. She was floating rubber companies it appeared with enormous success. She had very nearly been engaged to a law-sharp named Austin, but had got out of it in time. She was reported in Liverpool to be struck on some palm oil clerk on the Coast, but Captain Image proclaimed that to be rot, and what did Carter-me-lad think?

"Well, of course, there was Cascaes," said Carter judicially, "but I don't see there was anyone else. All the rest of the men she met out here were either married or engaged."

But George Carter whistled cheerfully to the stars as his boat-boys paddled him up through the steaming mangroves to his abiding place that night, and Mr. Balgarnie and Captain Image nudged one another delightedly as they listened to his music.

Dutton and Maidson's launch, that ought to have served the factory in Copper River, turned out upon inspection to be even worse than Captain Image had forecasted, and the agent in charge was most enthusiastic in accepting the two five-pound notes that were offered for her. And thereafter for Carter and White-Man's-Trouble began a period of savage toil.

The white man was a mechanic born, but he had never seen an oil engine in his life, knew nothing of clutch, water-jackets, or reversing gear, and had to make his first acquaintanceship with a carburetor. The men at the factory were frankly ignorant of the launch's mechanism; said so indeed before they sold her.

"But I know we have got a plan-thing of the works stowed away somewhere," the agent stated. "Can you understand a machine from seeing a drawing?"

"Rather," said Carter.

"Well, we'll find it," said the agent, and they wasted two days in turning over every scrap of paper the factory contained, but the blue prints refused to discover themselves.

"Let you off your bargain if you like," said the agent ruefully, when the place had been searched through without success.

"Not a bit," said Carter. "Lend me a couple of boys

and I'll take those engines down and learn 'em for myself."

Now, to anyone who does not know the hot, steamy climate of a West African river from personal experience, the manner in which unguarded ironwork can decay would sound beyond the borderland of fact. A nut left long enough on a bolt in that moist stew of heat does not always rust fast. As often as not, when one takes hold of it with a spanner, the whole thing crumbles away into oxide.

The forty-five-foot launch, when Carter first took her over, lay half water-logged in the middle of a slimy creek. She was an open boat with her engines housed under a wooden hutch aft, which had been further reinforced by some rotten tarpaulin. She had no in-board reversing gear, but was fitted with a feathering propeller, which if all went well would drive her astern.

As she lay there she was a perfect picture of what could be done by neglect and ignorant handling, and there was not another man then resident under that enervating West African climate who would have thought her worthy of salvage. But Carter had got just that dogged drop in him that brings men out to the front, and he proceeded to clean up the launch's meagre tools and her spares, to borrow what others he could from the factory, and then to attack the engines. It was here that the prodigiousness of his job first displayed itself. The brasswork was sound enough—even West Africa could not eat into that—but everything iron was spongy with rust, and he had to set up a forge, and weld and shape afresh, out of any scrap he could find about the factory, each part as he destroyed it.

There was no such thing as a lathe about the place; there were not even taps and dies. He had to punch slots through his bolts and tighten them up with forged and filed wedges. For the out-board work on the feathering

propeller he put the launch on the bank and worked up to his armpits in the stinking slime, fitting, drilling, and rivetting with his imperfect tools.

The labor and the exposure very naturally brought its reward in a sharp dose of fever, but White-Man's-Trouble attended to that after the manner of the heathen, and he emerged from it little the worse, and bore with composure the derision of the other Europeans at the factory when they saw his whitened eyesockets.

The engines were not ornamental when he had finished with them, and they were cumbered with a hundred make-shifts; but when he gave the whole a final inspection, he told himself that no vital part had escaped a satisfactory repair. By a merciful chance there was tube ignition, and after a good deal of manipulation he got the burners to light. Then when the bunsens roared and the tubes glowed hot in their cage, he and the Krooboys ground at the starting handle and turned the engines till the sweat ran from them in rivulets. In England Carter had heard without understanding that internal combustion liked their "right mixture." He was thoroughly practised in finding the right mixture for that elderly oil engine before it coughed itself into any continuous activity.

The heavy oil for lubricating that had originally been sent out, Messrs. Dutton and Maidson's agent still had in stock because, as he explained, he had found no possible means of disposing of it, and the ordinary commercial square tins of paraffin were part of the wares they always held in quantity. So Carter was able to buy fuel, in all abundance, for his voyage. Food also he laid in, and a great roll of canvas, and then turned to his host to say good-bye.

"Wait a bit, man," said the agent, "and we'll build you a cabin out of that canvas that will keep at least the thick

of the dew off you at nights. There are sockets along the gunwales for awning stanchions that will carry bamboo side-poles capitably, and we can lash duplicate roof-plates across and rig you a double-roofed tent in style."

"Very much obliged," said Carter, "but I won't wait for that now. I intend to do it as we go up river. You'll notice I have shipped a big bundle of bamboos for the woodwork. Good-bye."

"You seem in the devil of a hurry."

"I am. Good-bye. Now then, Trouble, shove over that reversing lever to make the boat go ahead. Confound you, that's astern, you bushman. There, that's better. Good-bye all."

"Good-bye, and good luck," said the agent, and he told his subordinates at supper that night that another good, keen man had gone off to disappear in Africa.

But Carter was developing into one of those tough, tactful fellows that people call lucky because they always seem to succeed in whatever they set a hand to. When the flood tide was under her, the launch coughed her way up the great beer-colored river at a rate that sometimes touched ten knots to the hour. She added her own scents of half-burned paraffin and scorched lubricating oil to the crushed-marigold odor of the water, and disgusted all the crocodiles who pushed up their ugly snouts to see what came between the wind and their nobility. On the ebb she still hauled up past the mangroves at a good steady two miles every hour.

The engine, with rational treatment, seemed a very decent sort of machine, though the feathering propeller, even till its final days, was always liable to moods of uncertainty, and after twenty-four hours of sending the launch ahead, would without any warning suddenly begin to pull her astern. Still these erratic moods always yielded to

treatment, and, considering that she had been bought without a rag of reputation, Carter was always full of surprise at prolonged spells of good behavior.

He did not go up direct as he had come down in the King of Okky's sixty man-power war canoe. He prospected the labyrinth of waterways for other channels, and charted them out with infinite care. He intended to take every possible precaution for preserving the secrecy of his mine. Even if he was followed, and he took it for granted that on some future voyage he presently would be followed, he wanted to be able to puzzle pursuit.

At a point agreed upon he put into a village which sprawled along the bank, and presented the King's mandate, and demanded canoes. The villagers gave them without enthusiasm and without demur. He took these in tow, great cotton-wood dugouts that would hold a hundred men apiece, and hauled them after him, winding through great tree-hedged waterways where twilight reigned half the day, and then coming out between vast park-like savannas where the sun scorched them unchecked and grazing deer tempted the rifle.

When he arrived at Tin Hill again, the King's finger had left a visible mark. Great heaps of picked ore lay along the waterside ready for loading the flotilla. "Good man, Kallee!" said the Englishman appreciatively. "I'll dash you a new state umbrella for that."

The water-bellows organ that he had set up at the foot of the waterfall bellowed out its *boo-paa-bumm*, and against each of the great bamboo pipes there fluttered a bunch of red-dyed feathers to show that that other ju-ju man, his majesty of Okky, countersigned the warning not to unduly trespass.

Cargo after cargo Carter rushed down to the Coast, and

dumped on land he had hired behind a factory. Ever and again he sent a tidy parcel of ore to a smelter in England and in due time had more money put to his credit at the Bank of West Africa. But he did not try any expensive tricks with the home tin market just then. He had got out a new launch, a more solid affair this time, driven by a sixty horse-power gasoline engine that had low-tension magneto ignition, and so many other improvements on its predecessor, that White-Man's-Trouble, who had it in charge, tied a dried monkey's paw to the compression cock on each cylinder head, as an extra special protective ju-ju.

He carried a cook and an oil-stove galley, and at last even bought two tin plates and a knife and fork to assist his meals. He felt it was pandering to luxury, but he did it all the same. When he made that purchase he wondered how he would behave in a woman's society after so long living as a savage. As an after-thought he told himself that Laura was the woman he had in his mind, and hoped he would not shock her with his crudities. By way of carrying out good intentions to the full, he sat down there and then and wrote to her, and marvelled to find how little he had to say.

Then one day he came across Slade.

A canoe drew in alongside as he was towing down river with his tenth cargo, and brought off a note which said that there was a white man ashore who had run out of everything and would be eternally grateful for any European food that could be spared, and would gladly give him I.O.U. for same, as he was out of hard cash at the moment of writing, and had mislaid his check-book.

Carter had his misgivings, but sent off a goodly parcel of food and tobacco, and continued his way down stream. But the channel was new to him—he had a suspicion of being watched on his ordinary route—and he ran on a

sandbar on an ebbing tide, and the heavily laden dugouts were soon perched high and dry. So White-Man's-Trouble switched off his magneto and stopped the engines, and Carter put a hand under the gauze net to greet his prospective father-in-law.

Slade looked curiously at both the launch and her tow. "You've been getting hold of a gold mine of sorts, I hear. By the way, as you've arranged to start work as my son-in-law, I suppose I ought to get more familiar and call you Henry, or whatever it is."

"George, as a matter of fact."

"I believe you're right. George is what Laura did say. My mistake. Where is your gold mine?"

"It's tin. And it's up the rivers."

"Oh, keep it dark, my dear fellow, if you like. Not that it makes the smallest odds as far as I am concerned. You'd never catch me sweating after a mine. Besides, as a point of fact, I'm doing pretty well at my present job. Getting rubber properties, you know, for the mysterious Kate."

"Miss O'Neill."

"Oh, certainly, Miss O'Neill, if you prefer it, though I don't see why you need be a prig with me."

"My late employer, you know."

"Ah, of course. And you admired her more than a little, so I gathered from Laura's letters, though she carefully refrained from saying so."

Carter pulled himself through the mosquito bar and hit the edge of the bunk. "Now, look here, Slade, I've known you ever since I've been on the Coast, but this is the first time we've met on the new footing. I don't want to quarrel with my prospective father-in-law, but, by Christopher, if you don't leave Miss O'Neill out of the tale as far as I'm concerned, there's going to be a row. Kindly remember I'm engaged to Laura, and intend to marry her whether you like it or whether you don't."

Slade laughed. "Nice filial sort of statement, that; but don't mind me. If you suit Laura's taste, I'll swallow you, too. I'm sure you'll be pleased to hear that I'm making a goodish thing of it myself just now. Kate—I beg your pardon—Miss O'Neill pays me my regular screw, and in addition gives me a nice sum down on every property I've bought for her, and a tidy block of shares when there's a company floated. I shall be able to give you and Laura a decent wedding present—in script. By the way, is she at Smooth River?"

"No, Grand Canary."

Slade stiffened. "How's that?"

"Africa wasn't safe for her. You ought to be dam' well ashamed of yourself for leaving her here. You knew the danger from old Kallee a big sight better than she did. And you left her without a cent to get away with and not an ounce of credit."

"Then," said Slade stiffly, "do I understand that she's gone to the islands at your expense?"

"You can understand what you please," said Carter truculently.

"Are you married to her?"

"I am not at present. I shall be as soon as it suits Laura's convenience and my own."

"You will kindly understand that I resent your interference with my finances and my daughter's."

"You may resent," said the prospective son-in-law, "till you're black in the face, and I shan't lose sleep over it."

Bang went something outside, and Slade started. "Good Lord," he said, "there's somebody firing at us. Sit down, man, on the floor."

"Nothing of the kind," said Carter testily. "My boy Trouble has got the engines going to try to work us off this bank, and with his usual cleverness he has contrived a

back fire, that's all. There—you can smell it. Now, I don't think you are a quarrelsome man as a general thing?"

"Not I. Too much trouble to quarrel with people."

"Well, I'll just ask you to give Laura and myself your benediction, and leave the rest to us."

Slade let off his limp laugh. "If a wedding present of such dubious value will please you, I'm most pleased to give it. Especially as I see you're inclined to stick to my little girl. To tell the truth, I'd heard you were after somebody else and it made me rather mad. You know how rumors float about in the bush."

Carter's lips tightened. "Who's the other person, please?"

"Oh, just my present employer—and your late one. But I've no doubt it's all a mistake."

"If you'll apply to her, I've no doubt she'll endorse that sentiment most thoroughly. I don't think Miss O'Neill's a person to throw herself away on one of her own ex-servants."

Slade chuckled. "If you put it that way, I'm sure she isn't. By the way, do you know who she is?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I suppose you've discovered by this time that the late Godfrey O'Neill was a bachelor, and Kate's no relation to him at all. He and his sister Jane, who married a hopeless blackguard called Craven, adopted her between them and brought her up. I've never fagged myself to find out how she was bred, but you're one of these energetic fellows that like to dig into pedigrees, and I thought probably you'd know."

"I don't know, and I shan't inquire."

"All right, don't get excited about it, neither shall I. D'ye know I think if you could soften that genial man-

ner without straining yourself, it would be an improvement. I'm led to believe that fathers-in-law expect a civility and even at times a certain mild amount of deference."

"Did you defer to your father-in-law?" asked Carter brutally.

The tone was insulting and the meaning plain, and ninety-nine men out of a hundred in a similar place would have resented it fiercely. But Slade merely yawned. His sallow face neither twitched nor changed its tint. He got up and stretched himself lazily. "So that's the trouble, is it? Well, you didn't ask me to consult you when I chose a wife, and I didn't ask you to fall in love with my daughter." He turned his head and eyed Carter thoughtfully—"You are in love with her, I suppose?"

"Can you suggest any other possible reason why I should ask her to marry me?"

"Well, I can hardly imagine you did it for the honor of an alliance with me. I suppose if I were an energetic man I should try and worry out what it is you're so sore about. It must be something beyond the detail that Laura's got a touch of color in her, because of course you knew that from the first moment you met her. But I guess the something else will show itself in its own good time. In the meanwhile if you'll give me an account of what you advanced to Laura for this Grand Canary trip, I'll give you an I.O.U. for it. I don't care to be indebted to anyone for things like that."

"I'll perhaps send in the bill when I hear there's a possibility of getting cash payment," said Carter dryly.

And then for the first time Slade lost his temper, and he cursed his future son-in-law with all an old Coaster's point and fluency. Every man has his tender point, and here was Owe-it Slade's. Throughout all his life he had

never paid a bill if he could help it, and he had accepted the consequent remarks of injured parties with an easy philosophy. But it seemed he owned a nice discrimination; some items were "debts of honor," and these he had always sooner or later contrived to settle. And the account which he decided he owed Carter for Laura's maintenance in Grand Canary he set down as one which no gentleman could leave unpaid without besmirching his gentility.

CHAPTER XIX

SENHOR CASCAES

Now, as the servant of O'Neill and Craven, Carter had done his work well and indeed enthusiastically, and after he had left the firm's employ he had neither competed with them in business nor done them harm in any way whatever. It is true that at his memorable interview with the King of Okky with a little persuasion he could have got that grateful monarch to take off the embargo which he had laid on the factories at Monk, Malla-Nulla, and Smooth River, though the fact that he did not put forward pressure on this point could hardly have reached the ear of Miss O'Neill. Indeed it is to be doubted if she ever knew that any reference to her name or affairs cropped up at all.

But be that as it may, she certainly from the date of sending her cable to Cascaes began to interest herself in opposing Carter's schemes.

The first he knew of it was a typewritten letter from Liverpool on the firm's note-paper beginning "Dear sir," and ending "O'Neill & Craven, per K. O'Neill." In arid business sentences it understood he had "a tin-mining proposition up Smooth River," it pointed out that "our firm for many years has had very far-reaching interests in this neighborhood," and it suggested that O'Neill and Craven should buy the mine "to prevent any clash of interests."

Carter replied to this curtly enough that Tin Hill was not in the market, and took the next boat home to Liverpool. He had picked up a distressed merchant skipper named Kettle, and put him in charge of the motor boat, and the canoes, and the mining work generally, and though in their short interview he decided that Kettle was the most tactless man in Africa, he believed him to be honest, and instinctively knew him to be capable.

"One thing I must ask," he said at the end of their talk, "and that is that you do not try any proselytizing up here. Your creed, I have no doubt, is very excellent at home, but out here where they are either Moslemin or nothing it will only stir up disputes, and that I won't have. Is that quite agreed?"

"I have learned, sir," said the sailor, "to obey orders to the letter even though I know them to be against an owner's best interests."

"Um," said Carter, and stared at him thoughtfully. "Well, Captain, I think it would be safest if you went on those lines. You will find your chief engineer, who carries the name of White-Man's-Trouble, beautifully unreliable in most things, but he understands the launch's engines wonderfully, and I like him. I'd take it as a favor if you'd deal with him as lightly as possible."

"I'll bear your words in mind, sir, though, as a man who has handled everything colored that serves afloat, I'd like to point out that pampering spoils them."

"The only other point to remember is that I've made my name up these rivers mainly by being known as a ju-ju man—sort of wizard, in fact. You'll have no difficulty, I suppose, in following up that line now I've given you the hint?"

"You'll pardon me, sir, but if that's made an essential, I must chuck up the job, sorely in need of employment as

I am at the moment. I have my conscience to consider. And besides as a liar I am the poorest kind of failure."

"Pooh, man, it's only a little acting that's required."

"Mr. Carter," said the sailor still more stiffly, "you see in me a man who's sunk very low, but I've never descended yet to working as a theatrical. According to our Persuasion, we hold that play acting is one degree less wicked than bigamy, and indeed often leads to it."

"Well," said Carter, "that mail-boat sails in half an hour's time, and I've got to go by her. I've been building on you, Captain, as the most trustworthy man now knocking about in West Africa."

"I'm all that, sir."

"So I shall have to respect your scruples and give you the billet."

"You shall never regret it for one minute, sir. You'll find the address of Mrs. Kettle on this slip of paper, and if you'll post three-quarters of my wages to her as they fall due, I'd take it as a favor. I've been out of—well, I won't pester you with domestic matters, sir, but the fact is I'm afraid she must be in very poor circumstances just at the moment."

"She shall have a check posted the day after I land in Liverpool. I give you my word for that."

"I thank you, Mr. Carter. Now, if you wanted another officer, there's a Mr. McTodd, an engineer who's just now at Akassa, that I could get."

"Thanky, Captain, but not for me."

"I believe I could persuade him to take a low wage."

"Not for me, Captain. I know McTodd. He's far too thirsty and far too cantankerous. You'd find him a ugly handful."

"Me! By James, sir, I can handle that swine in a way that would surprise you. He's had a bad up-bringing;

he belongs to the Free Kirk; but after I've had the manipulation of Mr. McTodd for a week, I can make him as mild as Norwegian Swiss milk."

"Well, we'll say 'not for the present,' at any rate. With the organization I've got together, and the backing from the King of Okky that I've told you about, you'll be able to haul down all the available ore if you follow out my instructions, and when it comes to bonus, Captain, if you've been successful, you'll find me a generous paymaster. I don't toil for nothing myself. I work about ten times as hard as my neighbors, and draw in about seventeen times as much pay. I like a man who has got the same ambitions."

The little sailor sighed. "I've always done ten times the normal whack of work, sir, but somehow I've missed fingering the dibs. I tell you flat, fourteen pounds a month has been good for me, and month in and month out I've not averaged ten."

"Then, if that's the case," said Carter briskly, "just here should come the turn in your fortunes. Shake hands, Captain. Good-bye to you, good health and good luck. Here's my surf boat. The steamer's heaving short."

"Good-bye, sir," said Kettle, "I'm sure you'll remember to send that check."

The mail-boat called as usual at Las Palmas and was boarded on arrival by the usual batch of invalids and Liverpool trippers for the run home. Carter landed as soon as the port doctor gave clearance papers, rowed to the mole and chartered a tartana, between whose shafts there drooped a mouse-colored mule. In it he bumped over the badly laid tram lines from the Isleta to the city, and then left the city by the Telde road.

Las Palmas is the meeting place of all West Africa, and

if one is there long enough, one expects to meet sooner or later every man who has business or other interests on the Coast. Carter waved his hand to a Haûsa constabulary officer in the gateway of the Catalina, and to a Lagos branch boat skipper who was standing on the steps of the Elder Dempster office. Coming down from the telegraph station he saw one of the Germans who had been frightened out of Mokki, and under a café awning by the dry river bed no less a personage than Burgoyne of Monk River waved a hospitable hand and invited him to try a glass of Bass.

But further on, where the Telde road leaves the city, he saw a man whose walk he knew, and instinctively leaned out from the tartana's awning to show himself, and to wave a greeting. The man was Cascaes. But the Senhor Cascaes stared him coolly in the face, and—cut him dead.

The tartana rattled on, and Carter nodded after the Portuguese thoughtfully. "You have always hated me pretty tenderly," he mused. "I wonder why. I've hampered you a dozen times, but it's only been in the ordinary way of business, and what any half-baked Portuguese has got to expect. You surely can't be up against me for that."

Laura was not living in the convent, but lodged in the house of a banana farmer just beyond. Carter found her in the garden. She was sitting on the end of a bench overhung with great lavender clots of wistaria at one end and shaded by a purple mass of bougainvillea at the other. He noted with a queer thrill that there was something cold in the outward form of her greeting.

She returned his kiss accurately enough, but without enthusiasm. Still, from the moment she saw him, the light came into her eyes that he had grown to know so well. The two things did not seem somehow or other to tally.

Carter sat himself on the bench and took a good hold on his nerves. Then he slid an arm round her waist and drew her to him. "Well," he said, "out with it. What's the trouble?"

She dropped her head on his shoulder contentedly enough. "Oh, the usual. When you're away from me, dear, I never feel quite certain if I ought to marry you."

"Now, that's awkward, isn't it? But as I have been up country colloquing with your other suitor, old Kallee, you couldn't very well have been with me there."

"I wish you hadn't gone."

"How delightfully unreasonable! We'd nothing to boil the pot on before, and now we've plenty, and neither of us is a bit the worse. What's broke since I've been away?"

"The world, I think," said Laura miserably.

"Then I hope I'm the sticking plaster that will mend it. Now, I want to hear all about Las Palmas, and what you have been doing. I see most of West Africa's here. Great Christopher! but it is fine to smell even the outside edge of civilization once more. My mother used to get tired of Wharfedale occasionally—ah, well, but that wouldn't interest you."

"No, you always cut yourself short when you begin to talk about your people."

"Do I? Well, what's sauce for the gander's sauce for the goose and you're the goose. Did you ever speak to me about your folk? Not one word, unless I dragged it out. Look here, Laura, are you trying to wrangle? Because if so, and if it's my fault, just say what's the crime, and give me my licking and get it over. I've got a clear conscience, and I'll be as penitent as you please."

"My dear, you've been perfect."

"Oh, I say," said Carter, "not too sudden. That sort of thing brings on heart attacks."

"I know your temptations, and you've been an honorable gentleman all through."

"I wish," said Carter whimsically, "you could persuade other people to look at me in that light. A missionary on the steamer yesterday called me a gin-selling ruffian because I happened to be sitting in his deck chair; one of the Protectorate officials a week ago accused me of being a smuggling gun-runner, because I've been up country and happened to get on with the native local headmen instead of scrapping with them, and Miss K. O'Neill, of our mutual acquaintance, has given me to understand that if I don't quit poaching on what she's pleased to call O'Neill and Craven's territory, she'll run me out of business. To give her her due I gather she proposes to pay me something to clear out."

"And you're going to take it from her?"

"Don't say 'her' so tragically. I'm not going to take anything from her, or from anyone else. I've got a mine, and it's a nailing good mine, and I'm going to run it by my lone or bust. It isn't a thing you could sell to a company, and besides it isn't one of those mines one would care to sell. It's too good for that. It's just a fortune for two people, and one of them is presently going to sign herself Laura Carter."

"George, you're quite the best man on earth."

"I doubt it myself at times. By the way, who should I see down in Las Palmas just now but Cascaes. He did me the honor of ignoring my existence. It wasn't the unshaved Coast Cascaes either; he'd got a clean blue chin, and the rest of him was dressed fit to kill. Now, what is the mysterious Cascaes doing here?"

"He's O'Neill and Craven's agent for Grand Canary. I thought you'd heard."

"No, it's news to me. It's news, moreover, that they had any business here that required an agent."

"They haven't."

"Hum," said Carter. "Miss O'Neill doesn't pay a salary without getting value for it. Now this is one of her deep-laid schemes."

Laura looked at him queerly. "Yes," she said, "this is one of Kate's deep-laid schemes, George. I wonder if you can see through it."

The sun above them scorched high, and the cool white buildings of the banana farmer threw the shortest of purple shadows. The fresh breath of the trade rustled the ferns and the palm leaves of the garden, and stirred the great masses of the bougainvillea into rhythmical movement. "It's grand to be in a place like this after a spell on the Coast," said Carter.

"Do you prefer it to England?" Laura asked pointedly.

Carter held down a sigh. "I believe I do," he said steadily. "Come, now, old lady, what do you say? Shall we buy a property here in Grand Canary, and settle down, and grow the finest flower garden in the island?"

"But roses are your favorite flower and they don't do well here in the South."

"Oh, it's roses that my father cares for, at least he and the mater together run the roses at home. But I think my taste runs more to bougainvillea, say—and great trees of scarlet geranium with stalks as thick as one's leg, and palms, and tree ferns. Besides, a garden means irrigation here, and I've never had a real water-works scheme of my own to play with since I was a kid and worked out a most wonderful system by the old smelt mill at home. Yes, we should have great times gardening out here."

They had never said so in words, but both of them knew that George Carter would never take Laura back to England when once he had married her, and the girl through all her fierce tropical love for him recognized what this

self-denial must cost and valued it to the full. But presently she brought him back to the matter they had been talking of before.

"Can't you see why Kate sent Senhor Cascaes here, George?"

"I haven't given him another thought. Besides, although Miss O'Neill is seeing fit to interfere with me, I don't intend to meddle with her."

"I think you ought to defend what's your own."

"Certainly I shall. Can anyone accuse me of not doing so? But I don't see why you keep harping on Cascaes. The man is an open admirer of Miss O'Neill's, and I suppose she's tickled thereby. Anyway that's the only reason I can see why she should have provided him with a job."

"Do you mean to say you think it is Kate the Senhor Cascaes is running after?"

"Certainly I do. Who else was there at Mokki?"

"Do you think I've so few attractions then?"

"But, my good girl, you're engaged to me, and he knew it all along. There was no secret about our engagement. Everybody about the factory knew of it."

"And because a girl is engaged, or even married, do you think that's any bar to another man admiring her?"

Carter whistled. "I've been a blind ass, and I must say I did refuse to listen to the highfalutin' nonsense Cascaes wanted to pour into my sympathetic ear. How often have you seen him here in Grand Canary?"

"He has called every day."

"That's not answering my question."

"George, dear, give me credit for loyalty. He told me one day when you were building that fort at Mokki that he liked me, and that if the Okky-men came he would die cheerfully before any harm should come to me; and I told

him that he had no right to say such things to a girl who was engaged to you."

"Why wasn't I told of this?"

"Because he said to me he had nearly shot you once, and I was afraid that if there was any trouble, dear, you might be hurt."

"You could have trusted me," said Carter dryly, "to keep my end up with a dago like that. Besides, if you'd given me the tip, I could have seen to it that I had the drop on him first."

Laura shivered. "You are rather mediæval. I don't want to be fought for."

"Still, I gather from what you say that you've been seeing the fellow here?"

"Never when I could help it. Each day I've refused to see him when he came to the house. But he has waited for me when I went out into the country, and once he was here in the garden, sitting on this very seat, when I came out after lunch."

"Does he always tell the same old tale?"

"He says always he wants to marry me."

"I thought you said you refused to listen to him?"

"George, don't be unreasonable. I've told him over and over again it's no use; I've gone away every time we've met; but it seems to be the one occupation of his life."

"Except for running after you, I can imagine he does have plenty of time on his hands out here."

"Don't you think, George, he was sent to the island to have nothing to do except that?"

"Sent here who by? By Miss O'Neill, do you mean? Great Christopher! Laura, what morbid idea will you have in your head next? I don't flatter myself that outside business Miss O'Neill cares whether I'm alive or dead, and as for you, well, the pair of you may be friendly

enough when you were kids, but you seemed to have outgrown any past civilities last time I saw you together on the Coast. Don't you go and run away with any wild cat notions about Miss O'Neill. She's got one amusement in the world, and that's business, and if she's sent Cascaes here to Las Palmas, you can bet your best frock the only job he's got in view so far as she's concerned is dividend hunting. Apropos of which, I nearly forgot. Here's something to practise your autograph in."

"Why, it's a check-book."

"Clever girl. Guessed it in once. I just opened a credit for you down at the bank in Las Palmas for £500 to be going on with. That's for chocolate, and hairpins, and a mantillina, and the latest thing in Spanish slippers. I say, Laura, you must get a pair of those tan ones, with the laces tied in a bow just down over the toe. And if you don't go through the lot whilst I'm away squaring mine matters up in England, I shall take you solemnly round the shops when I come back here, and buy you a trousseau of all the ugliest and most unbecoming garments they have in stock."

"You are good to me, dear. But I can never spend all that."

"If you've any balance you find unwieldy, buy Cascaes a smile with it, if you can find one that will fit. No, seriously, old lady, you will be marrying a rich man, although you did not know it when you took him, and you may as well get used to spending. It's no use for us preparing to save."

"No use preparing to save," poor Laura repeated miserably to herself. "There will be no—one except ourselves to look forward to." But she said nothing of this aloud. She just thanked him, and snuggled in to his shoulder and patted his sleeve.

Far away over the corner of the isle a steamer hooted in the harbor of the Isleta, and the sound came to them dimly through the foliage plants. Carter looked at his watch. "Hullo, I must go, or the criminal who drives my tartana will flog that poor beast of a mule to death in his effort to catch the boat. So now, Miss Slade, just please give me a sample of your best good-bye."

Twilight does not linger in the summer months, even so far north as Grand Canary. The sun was balanced in lurid splendor on the rocky backbone of the isle as Carter said his last words of farewell, making the dead volcanoes look as though at a whim they could spring once more into scarlet life. It was dark when he got on the road, and the evening chill rode in on the Trade. The mouse-colored tartana mule sneezed as he pressed his galled shoulders into the collar.

Carter wedged himself in a corner of the carriage and resolutely looked on life with a reckless gayety. After all, what was this ache called Love? To the devil with it! Hereafter he would eat, and drink, and work, especially work, and—well, Laura was a good sort, and he intended to play the game, and please her. He had given his word to Laura, he forgot exactly why, but he had given it, and that was enough. For good or evil he was one of those dogged Englishmen who keep to a promise that had once been given.

Then with an equal doggedness he thrust all these things from his mind, and resolutely clamped down his thoughts to Tin Hill and the details of its working. No news had reached him of the importance which the freakish British public had placed upon his little arrangement about that detail of the human sacrifices. He saw himself merely as an unknown business man who in the near future would be able to sway a thing which at present he knew nothing

about, and that was the tin market. The idea unconsciously fascinated him. He had no enmity against the present producers of tin, did not know indeed who they were, but he smiled grimly as he thought of the way in which presently he would govern them. It was the lust for power, which is latent in so many men, leaping up into life.

The brilliant stars shone down on him from overhead, and the cool Trade carried to him salt odors of the sea, but they got from him no attention. His mind was journeying away in the African bush, on spouting river-bars, in offices, on metal exchanges. . . .

He was roused from these dreams with much suddenness. In his up country journeying in Africa he had developed that animal instinct for the nearness of danger which is present in us all, but in nine hundred and ninety-nine men out of the thousand becomes atrophied for want of use. In the river villages the natives had given him a name which means Man-with-eyes-at-the-back-of-his-head.

It was this slightly abnormal sense that sprang into quick activity, and Carter made so sudden a stoop that his face smacked against the shabby cushions on the opposite side of the tartana. But simultaneously he turned and clutched through the night, and seized a wrist, and held it with all his iron force. A moment later he found with his other hand that the wrist was connected with a long bright-bladed knife, so he twisted it savagely till that weapon fell onto the dirty carpet on the floor. And all the time, be it well understood, no sounds had been uttered, and the mouse-colored mule jogged steadily on with the tartana through the dust and the night.

Then Carter began to haul in on the wrist, and the man to whom it was attached came over into the body of the

vehicle, bumping his knees shrewdly against the wheel-spokes en route.

"Ah, Cascaes, that's you, is it? And I thought once you claimed to be a gentleman, and agreed not to go at me from behind? Well, I'm afraid there's only one kind of medicine that will suit you, and that's the band one gives to dogs that turn treacherous. Have you got any suggestions to make?"

The Portuguese held his tongue.

"Ready to take your gruel, are you? Well, I propose to give you a full dose. Hi there, driver, pull up. Wake, you sleepy head! What is it? Why, I've picked up a passenger whilst you've been nodding, and now we want to get down for a minute. Here, give me your whip."

Carter's arm was lusty and his temper raw. Moreover, the whip, being the property of a Las Palmas tartana driver, was made for effective use.

"I may not cure you," said Carter between thumps, "of a taste for cold-blooded assassination, but I'm going to make the wearing of a coat and breeches an annoyance to you for the next three weeks at any rate." After which statement, as the whip broke, he flung the patient into the aloe hedge at the side of the road, got back into the tartana and told the driver to hurry on to the Isleta, or they'd miss the boat.

CHAPTER XX

MAJOR MEREDITH

"THE *Liverpool Post*," said Mrs. Craven, "allows itself to hint gently that you've been rather persecuting Mr. Carter, Kate. Now, I don't call the *Post* a sensational paper, nor is it given to introducing personal matters, as a rule."

"I wish it would mind its own business and leave mine alone," said Kate crossly.

"The oppression of nations or individuals," read Mrs. Craven, "'may begin by being a matter of merely domestic importance, but when it assumes sufficient dimensions it forces itself into public notice.'"

"Do they couple my name with that?"

"They leave you to do that yourself," said the old lady dryly.

"Well, I don't mind. They may say what they like. I'm entirely within my rights."

"The *Post* admits that. Here, I'll read you what it says, my dear. 'Mr. George Carter, whose name has been so prominently before the public of late in connection with his splendid efforts in winning over the King of Okky to the side of humanity, has himself been the victim of some very high-handed oppression. He has discovered a most valuable vein of tin in a part of the back country where no European explorer had ever trod before, and with toil and care, and in fact with genius, had brought cargo after cargo of the valuable ore down mysterious African creeks and rivers to a spot where the ocean steamers could con-

veniently ship it. To be precise, he hired from Messrs. Edmondson's small factory on the Smooth River a piece of waste-cleared ground, dumped his ore on that as he towed it tediously down those unknown creeks in a string of dugouts, and there let it accumulate so as not to flood the markets, and cause ruin to the tin industries in England—' Shall I go on? "

" Please do, Aunt."

" ' But presently an interviewer arrived in the shape of a well-known firm of West African merchants and financiers, who bought out Messrs. Edmondson's interest in their Smooth River factory, found that Mr. Carter had no lease, and gave him notice to quit within forty-eight hours. As an alternative to removal they demand an annual rent which amounts to more than fifteen per cent. of the value of the ore stacked there. In other words, they are endeavoring, in a manner that almost smacks of piracy, to force themselves into partnership with him.' "

" Sneak," said Miss O'Neill, " to go and tittle-tattle to the papers like that."

Mrs. Craven looked at the girl over her spectacles, and then said she, " Wait a minute till I read you a little more. ' We should add that what gives these proceedings a more unpleasant flavor than would appear at first sight is the fact Mr. Carter is unable to defend himself. He had left West Africa when action was first taken, and it has been discovered that he was still in ignorance of what had occurred when his steamer called at Las Palmas. The whole thing will be sprung upon him with a shock of unpleasant surprise when he lands in Liverpool to-morrow.' "

" Ah," said Kate.

Mrs. Craven folded the paper, stood up, and walked towards the door. " As usual, my dear, you have carried out your plan very perfectly."

"What plan?" asked Kate incautiously.

"Of treating Mr. Carter so badly," said Mrs. Craven, turning the handle, "that presently when he hits you back you will be able to bring yourself to hate him. But then you are always successful, Kitty dear, in everything you set your hand to—trying to be successful sometimes," Mrs. Craven added, and went out, and shut the door softly behind her.

Kate nodded at the door. "Aunt Jane," she said viciously, "there are moments when you are a perfect cat. But I will make him detest me for all that, and then I can truly and comfortably hate him. It's all very well their calling him a martyr. Why should everybody's feelings be consulted except mine?"

All the same, Kate bowed in a certain degree to public sentiment. One thinks also that she had not toughened herself sufficiently to meet Carter face to face. Anyway, she discovered that urgent affairs called her to London, and whirled off Aunt Jane to her flat that very night. She left Crewdson to fight the invader when he landed in Liverpool, and gave the old man definite instructions in writing that he was not to budge an inch from the firm's rights. "Show Mr. Carter this letter," she ordered, "if there is the least occasion for it."

But it seemed that West Africa pursued her. The telephone rang as soon as she got to the flat.

"That London? That Miss Head? This is Liverpool, Crewdson. London't just been calling you up. Will you ring Four-owe-seven-three Pad. What's that? No. Four-naught-seven-three Pad. Yes, that's it. Good-night, Miss."

Kate had more than half a mind to let 4,073 Pad alone. She was tired, and somehow in spite of all her successes she was a good deal dispirited. The British public had

bought no less than four great rubber companies that she had offered them; the shares were all at a premium; everybody was pleased; and she had transferred her own profits safely into land and trustee securities. Since her first burst of success, money had simply rolled in on her, and already it had ceased to give her amusement. Success lay sour in her mouth. She asked Fortune for just one thing more. Because she was a woman she could not go and get it for herself. She told herself that it was only a convention that held her back—but she shuddered and chilled all over at the thought of breaking that convention.

She sat in a deep soft chair, twisting her long gloves into a hard string, and staring into the glow of the fire, and then with a "Faugh" at her own weakness, she threw the gloves onto the fender, and walked across to a telephone that stood on a side-table.

"Four-owe-seven-three Pad, please. No, Forty-seventy-three Paddington. Yes. Hullo? Hullo? Is that Four-nought-seven-three? This is Miss O'Neill. Liverpool rang up to say you wanted to speak to me. Who is that, please?"

"No one you know," came in the small clear voice of the telephone. "One of those sort of people who writes letters to the papers above some such signature as 'Well-Wisher.'"

"If you don't give me your name," said Kate sharply, "I shall ring off."

"I don't think you will when I tell you I'm going to give you some news about your father."

"My father unfortunately is dead. You've got hold of the wrong Miss O'Neill."

The telephone laughed. "Not a bit of it, it's the lady who is known generally as Kate O'Neill I'm speaking with, but whose real name is Katherine Meredith."

Now Kate knew that Mrs. Craven was only "Aunt Jane" by courtesy and adoption, and had naturally wondered many times over who her real people might have been. She had always been a very practical young woman, and had not worried herself unduly over the matter; but still being human, she had her share of curiosity, and though the subject had always been strictly taboo at the house in Princes' Park, still that did not hinder her from discussing it with her own thoughts. And now, "Katherine Meredith!"

"I think you had better tell me who you are," she said to the telephone.

"I prefer anonymity. Do you know Day-Pearce?"

"No. Yes, perhaps I do, if you mean Sir Edward Day-Pearce, the West African man. I don't know him personally."

"All the better," rasped the telephone. "Anyway, he is lecturing to-night in a non-Conformist temple in Westbourne Grove—the Athenæum, they call it. Begins at eight. He's certain to say something about Meredith. I should try to go if I were you."

"I shouldn't dream—" Kate began, when whizz went the bell, and she was cut off. She rang again, got the inquiry office, found that 4,073 was a hairdresser's shop, once more got 4,073, spoke to the proprietor, learned that the telephone had been hired for an hour by a gentleman who had some business to transact. No, the gentleman had just gone. No, they didn't know who he was: never seen him before—Miss O'Neill's ring off had a touch of temper in it.

She went back to the deep soft chair and tried to bring her thoughts once more to the subject that had been in hand before the interruptions came. She was a business woman, and had trained herself to concentrate the whole

of her mind on any matter she chose. But somehow those two little words "My father" kept cropping up; and presently she began trying to picture what her mother was like. She went to the telephone and called up a theatre agency. She had to say three times over "Athenæum—Westbourne Grove" before the young man at the other end grasped the name, and she was rewarded by hearing him laugh as he said he had no seats for Sir Edward Day-Pearce's lecture that evening.

"Where can I get one?" she demanded.

"At the door, madam," was the polite response. "I believe the prices of entrance are threepence, sixpence, and one shilling, unless you happen to be a subscriber."

Supposing the whole thing were a hoax to draw her there, and by some means to make her look ridiculous? It was quite likely. She was a successful woman, and had already learned that one of the prices of success is the spitting of spite and envy. But difficulties did not often stay long in the path of Miss Kate O'Neill. She picked up a telephone directory, turned the pages, found a number, called it up, and made certain arrangements. Thereafter she dressed, dined, and took Mrs. Craven to laugh over the new piece at the Gaiety.

But poor Kate found even the Gaiety dull that night. There was a man on the stage with a red head. He was not in the least like Carter either in looks, speech, or manner, but—well, it must have been the hair which persisted in calling up that unpleasant train of thought which kept her vaguely irritated throughout all the evening.

There was a bundle of type script waiting for her when she got back to the flat, which happened to be the verbatim report of Sir Edward Day-Pearce's lecture which she had arranged that two stenographers should go and take down for her, but she did not choose to open this before the keen

eyes of Aunt Jane. Instead she waited till that astute old lady should see fit to go to bed, and watched her eat sandwiches, drink a tumbler of soda-water lightly laced with whiskey, and listened to a résumé of all the other plays that had filled the Gaiety boards since the house was opened. At the end of which Kate had the final satisfaction of being laughed at.

"You've been itching to be rid of me ever since we got back, my dear, and as a general thing you don't in the least mind saying when you want to be alone. I wonder what's in those mysterious papers you're so anxious I shouldn't ask about. Good-night, Kitty dear."

"Good-night, Aunt Jane," said Kate, and opened the package.

The lecture was unexciting. It was the dull record of a dull but capable man, who knew his work thoroughly, did it accurately, and in the telling of it left out all the points that were in the least picturesque or interesting. Sir Edward had spent half a lifetime in Colonial administration, and the only times he rose into anything approaching eloquence was when he had to tell of some colonial interest that was ruthlessly sacrificed by some ignorant official at home for the sake of a vote or a fad. Four several instances he gave of this, and these stood out warmly against the gray background of the rest of the speech.

But to Kate, who knew her West Africa by heart, it was all dull enough reading till he came to almost the last paragraph.

"It is by a peculiar irony," the type report read, "that an agreement should recently have been come to by which the notorious King of Okky promises to discontinue his practice of human sacrifice. It is six-and-twenty years since I first went out to West Africa, and my immediate

superior then was Major Meredith. He was a man of the highest ideals, and we all thought of tremendous capabilities. He saw what was wanted on the spot, and carried out his theories with small enough regard for ignorant criticism at home. By the exercise of tremendous personal influence, and at a fearful risk, he made his way to Okky City itself, saw its unspeakable horrors, and made a treaty with the then king. In return for certain concessions the king was to come under British protection, and of course give up objectionable practices. Well, I don't know whether there are any of the Anti-British party here, but I daresay most of you will think that the addition of a quarter of a million of square miles of rich country to the empire was no mean gift. Ladies and gentlemen, you little know what the Government was then. 'Perish West Africa' was one of their many creeds, and with Exeter—" [here the reporter had written the word "Disturbance," and evidently missed the next few sentences]—"I don't care whether you like it or whether you are decently ashamed, the thing's true. They refused to ratify the treaty, and my poor chief was censured for exceeding instructions. Well, the backers of the high-minded potentate, as I believe they called themselves, got their way, and I wish they were not too ignorant to realize what their mean little action caused in human lives. Putting the human sacrifice in Okky City at the very low estimate of eight thousand a year, in five-and-twenty years that brings the figure up to two hundred thousand black men and women whose blood lies at the door of those unctuous hypocrites who made it their business to break Major Meredith because he was an Imperialist."

Again the reporter put in the word "Disturbance," but he apparently managed to catch the next sentence. "Aye, you may yap," the old administrator went on, "and I

dare say from the snug looks of some of you you're own sons of the men who did it, and I hope you feel the weight of their bloodguiltiness. Two hundred thousand lives, gentlemen, and all thrown away to pander to the fads of some ignorant theorists who had never been beyond the shores of England. If Major Meredith could have held out against the clamor, I believe that he would have been a man to stand beside Clive, and Rhodes, and Hastings, in the work he would have done for the Empire; but as it was he left the service in disgust, and drifted away into the savage depths of that Africa he knew so well, and had so vainly tried to help. His wife went with him, and, so I heard, bore him a daughter before she died. A rumor reached me that some trader brought the child to England and adopted her, but poor Meredith—well, he has disappeared from the record. . . .”

The lecture closed, a few paragraphs farther on, again with “Disturbance.”

Kate folded the sheets and put them on the table. She was somehow conscious of a queer thrill of elation. One of the discomforts that an adopted child who does not know her history must always carry through life, is the feeling of having been bred of parents that were probably discreditable. She had vague memories of her babyhood. There was a village of thatched houses and shade trees. She had clear recollection of one day playing in the dust with the village dogs and the other babies—black babies, they were—when a huge spotted beast sprang amongst them, roared, and for a moment stood over her, the white baby. At intervals she had dreamed of that beast ever since. From maturer knowledge she knew it must have been a leopard, and leopards do not grow beyond a certain normal size. But in dreamland that leopard was always enormous. . . . She could never remember whether

in the dusty village street under the heat and the sunshine it had done damage, or whether the pariah dogs had frightened it away.

Try how she would, she could remember no mother. The women of the village were all black, and she lived, so faint memory said, first with one and then with another. She had no clear recollection of any of them. . . . And, indeed, there might have been many villages, because there were hammock journeys, with a pet monkey riding on the pole, and walls of thick green bush on either hand that held dangers. . . . She still had a scar just below the nail on the first finger of her right hand where the monkey bit her one day when she teased it.

But plainest of all these dim pictures of the memory was one of a white man who at rare intervals came into the scene and took her on his knee. He had iron-gray hair and beard which were shaggy and matted, and he always had a pipe between his lips and a glittering eyeglass on a black watered-silk ribbon for her to play with. Furthermore, he always brought some present when he came to see her, and gave another present also, if he was pleased, to the black women with whom she lived. It was he who hung round her neck the Aggry bead that she still had locked away in the bottom tray of her jewel case.

She remembered this man with a vague kindness. But if Godfrey O'Neill cut her off from him with such completeness it must have been for some profoundly good reason. Uncle Godfrey had been far from squeamish. Uncle Godfrey in his lazy way stuck to friends when everybody else voted them far outside the pale. And therefore, she had argued, the iron-gray haired man with the eyeglass must have done something peculiarly disgraceful.

That he was her father she was entirely sure. Occasionally she had tried to argue with herself that she was little

more than a babe when she saw him last, and was no judge, and that possibly the iron-gray man was her father's friend. But something stronger than mere human reason always rose up in arms against such a suggestion.

Sir Edward's halting lecture had roused up one recollection in her head that heretofore had persistently eluded her. A thousand times in those dreams of Africa, and the hot villages, and the pet monkey with its red seed necklace, and all the other old dim scenes, she had on the tip of her memory the name of the iron-gray man with the eyeglass, and a thousand times she had missed catching it by the smallest hair. In a flash it came back—he was Meredith.

Was he alive still? She could not tell; but that she would find out now. For once she adjudged old Godfrey O'Neill to be wrong. She was not going to let the discreet veil remain any longer over a man who, whatever his subsequent career had been, at any rate was a martyr once, and her father.

CHAPTER XXI

THE FEELING ON THE COAST

"WELL, Carter-me-lad," said Captain Image, coming into the room, "they tell me you're the most unpopular man in Liverpool. They want to give you dinners, and put your photo in the papers, and hear you make a speech, and you won't have anything to do with anybody. What's broke? Tin troubling you?"

"Oh! tin's all right. But I've got a constitutional dislike to marching along at the tail of a brass band, that's all. Besides I feel an awful humbug when all these silly stay-at-home people insist on believing that the one and only reason I went up country was to chop down old Kallee's private crucifixion tree. Have a cigar?"

"Not me in here, me lad. I came home from the Islands with the old *M'poso* full of passengers, and I've smoked myself half sick on cigars. I'll suck at a pipe. By the way, I've got a message for you from Kallee. The old sinner came on board himself when we were lying off Edmondson's factory trying to get your ore, and nearly drank the ship dry before I could get quit of him. Owe-it Slade's been palming off I.O.U.'s on him. He'd got quite a sheaf of them. He says when you marry Laura he'll give them to you as a wedding present, or words to that effect. But in the meanwhile if he can catch Slade he's just going to chop his head off to prevent him putting any more paper into circulation."

"Well?"

"Well, you see, me lad, Slade owes our fo'c'sle shop a matter of four pounds odd which we can't collect, and he's got a Holland gun of mine that I shouldn't really like to lose. Besides, come to thinking of it, I suppose Laura's fond of him anyway. Couldn't you do something for him?"

Carter stared. "Has he left O'Neill and Craven's, then?"

Captain Image stopped down the tobacco in his pipe with a horny forefinger. "Why, no, and you'll have to pay to get him away."

"But what mortal use is he to me?"

Captain Image's pipe worked hard and he spoke in jerks. "Rubber palaver. Owe-it Slade's the smartest man at dem rubber palaver on the Coast."

"Pooh! That slackster!"

"That's where you're making the usual mistake. Slade's got his faults. He wastes his money, he never pays his bills, he sponges for all eternity, and he makes out he was born lazy. But don't you believe him. Who got Miss Kate all these rubber properties that she's floated off into such whacking big companies?"

"Miss Kate O'Neill."

"No more than you did, me lad. It was just Owe-it Slade. And to think," Captain Image added with a sigh, "I always put that man down as a borrowing waster, and never even hustled him to collect cargo for me. Why, if I'd known then what I know now, I could have bought rubber lands through him, for a half surf boat full of gin, that I might have sold to a company myself, and dined off turkey in my own house ashore every day for all the rest of my natural life. Why, my Christian Aunt! I might even have married, if I'd worked him properly."

Captain Image dabbed with his forefinger on Carter's

coat sleeve and left a print of tobacco ash. "You buy up Owe-it Slade, me lad, and not only is your fortune made, but—well," he added rather lamely, "you buy him up and just remember I told you to."

"But—what were you going to say?"

"Well," said Image desperately, "I didn't intend to tell you, but all up and down the Coast, and in the hotels in Las Palmas, and even in the bars and offices here, the boys don't like the way Miss Kate is playing it on you. It's all right for a girl to take to business, if she's built that way, but she ought to play the game. Of course the general idea is, me lad, that you and she started sweet-hearting and had a turn-up, but of course I'm in the know, and I've called 'em dam' liars every time they've started that tale, and told 'em about Laura and how you were fixed up long before Miss Kate came down onto the Coast. Why, Carter-me-lad, I've backed up my words with bets to that extent that if you were to marry the lady now by any kind of accident, I should stand to lose what with one fiver and another, a matter of two hundred and fifty pounds."

Carter laughed. "That puts it finally out of the region of possibility, doesn't it? I can't let you lose a pile like that. But all the same I'm not going to interfere with Miss O'Neill. If Slade's useful to her, let her keep him. I'm much obliged to a lot of officious idiots for sympathizing with me, but really they're moving on a lot too fast. It will be quite time for other people to be sorry for me when I start in to be sorry for myself. Besides, I thought you, at any rate, were a strong admirer of Miss O'Neill's?"

"I am," said Captain Image patiently. He always flattered himself that he left the more eloquent parts of his speech at Sierra Leone on each trip north, and picked

them up again there next voyage for vigorous use on the Coast. It was his pride that he conformed most suitably to Liverpool's sedate atmosphere. "I admire Miss Kate as a lady more than anyone I know, and if she were only twenty years older, and I could afford it, I wouldn't mind going in for her myself. But it's her business ideas, as she showed them over that factory of Edmondson's, that I can't stand. The way she stuck up the rent on you, me lad, is the limit. Why, if that sort of thing went on, nobody would be safe. It's Oil-Trust morals. I'm Welsh myself, but I do draw the line somewhere."

"What, Welsh?" said Carter politely. "I should never have guessed it."

"I am," said Captain Image with sturdy truth, "and many times, look you, I am proud of it. Which reminds me that little red-bearded Kettle that you employed to run your launch and the mine is Welsh also. I don't want to go against a fellow-countryman who's down on his luck, but I saw him with my own eyes give old Kallee an illustrated methody tract on bigamy when he was on the *M'poso*, and if His Portliness finds anyone kind enough to translate it for him, there'll be the devil to pay. Kallee's black, but he's a king, and he's not the kind to let any man tamper with his domestic happiness. Now about Slade——"

"We'll drop Slade. He's Miss O'Neill's man. If Miss O'Neill chooses to amuse herself by gunning for me, that's her concern. But I don't shoot back."

Captain Image shook his head sadly. "Well, me lad, if you won't lift a hand to help yourself, I don't see there's anything more to be said." He put his pipe in his pocket, stood up and prepared to go. "Oh, by the way, did anyone tell you about old Swizzle-Stick Smith?"

"Not dead, is he?"

"Lord bless you, no, me lad. Very much the reverse. Look here, what was your idea of that man?"

"In what way?"

"What was he before he became the disreputable old palm oil ruffian you first knew at Malla-Nulla?"

"Oh, I suppose he was less disreputable once. He'd let himself drift, that's all. One does get into frightfully slack ways in those lonely factories."

"Did he strike you as the usual type of man a factory agent's made of?"

"Why, no."

"Gentleman, wasn't he, or had been once? Always used to hitch up the knees of his pyjamas when he sat down; spoke well; knew Latin; could swear round any man on the Coast when he was that side out; and had a pleasant way of making you feel you were dirt when the mood took him that way?"

Carter laughed. "He had some characteristic little ways."

"Ever strike you he'd been a soldier once?"

"I suppose it did."

"Well, me lad, when I was tied up by that Edmondson factory, a boat swung up to my ladder and a military party stepped out. Quite the swell, I can tell you: nobby white helmet, hair cut with scissors, smart gray mustache, gray imperial bristling underneath it, clean-shaved chin, white drill coat with concertina pockets, white drill pants with a crease down the shin, latest thing in pipe-clayed shoes. If it hadn't been for the old trick with the eye-glass and the black ribbon, I take my dick I shouldn't have known him.

"'Hullo Swizzle-Stick Smith,' said I, 'you are a howler. Whose kit have you been robbing?'

"'Captain Image,' says he, 'allow me—ar—to present

to you Mr. Smith, a new acquaintance. It is not—ar—my wish to be mistaken for any of your discreditable—ar—pot companions of the past.’ That to me, and on my own deck, me lad. What do you think of that?”

“I bet you boiled.”

Captain Image scratched his head vexedly. “The rum part of it is, I didn’t. Somehow I took the man at his own valuation. There didn’t seem anything else left to do. He went into my chart house, and sat there as solid as if he’d been the governor of a colony with six letters after his name. Just drank one cocktail and took three swallows at it, I’ll trouble you, and actually left a second to stand by itself on the tray. When I handed him the tobacco tin to see if he’d got that frowsy old pipe in his pocket, I’m hanged if he didn’t pull out a book of cigarette papers and roll himself a smoke with those. Well, me lad, when I remembered Swizzle-Stick Smith’s opinion of cigarettes, you might have knocked me down with a teaspoon.”

“He scared me out of cigarette smoking at Malla-Nulla,” said Carter. “He was pretty emphatic over the weak-kneed crowd (as he called them) who only smoked cigarettes. But why all this revolution in Mr. Smith’s habits? Did he give any reason for it?”

“That’s the amazing thing, he didn’t—at least not a proper reason. He just let me see that the new Mr. Smith—I got to calling him Major, by the way—was no relation to the Swizzle-Stick Smith that was, and then went back over the side to his boat.”

“I suppose,” said Carter thoughtfully, “he wanted the reformation to be advertised.”

“Well, you don’t think I’d keep a choice bit like that to myself,” said Captain Image. “Naturally I spread the news, though I certainly didn’t tell all the Coast, as I’ve

told you, the way that the late Swizzle-Stick Smith made me feel second man in my own chart house. But that man doesn't need any advertising; the most genial drunk wouldn't take liberties with him, and you'd fall into calling him Major yourself if you sat with him for ten minutes. My Christian Aunt! just think what a filthy old palm oil ruffian he used to be."

"Did he give any reason for pulling up?"

"Oh, I asked him that. Managed to slip it in, you know. And he answered as dry as you please, 'Urgent private affairs, Captain Image,' and then tagged on some Latin, which, as he remarked would be the case, I didn't understand. You know, me lad," said the sailor thoughtfully, "he's a gentleman right through, but I shouldn't think that even in his palmy days he was a man who would have got on particularly well with the people. A bit superior, I should call it, with those who hadn't been birched in the same public school where he was birched."

"I suppose," said Carter, "this is another instance of Miss O'Neill's influence."

"As to that," said Image, "I can't say, me lad; but this I can tell you, the Major's what he calls 'sent in his papers' to O'Neill and Craven's."

"The deuce he has. What on earth for?"

"Can't tell you. Old Crewdson gave me the news. I said to him I didn't suppose the loss of Swizzle-Stick Smith, even now that he had changed himself into Major Smith, would make their firm put up the shutters. But Crewdson wouldn't take it as a joke. He told me Miss Kate was very sorry indeed to lose him, and had herself written to ask him to come and see her here in England. Now, me lad, what's her game in that?"

"I didn't know," said Carter resolutely, "and I don't want to know. As I tell you, I flatly refuse to interfere in any of Miss O'Neill's affairs."

CHAPTER XXII

A FISHERMAN AND HIS CATCH

THE fisherman was discontented.

The reasons for his discontent were not plain to the eye. There had been as good a fly water as anyone could want; there had been enough breeze to ruffle the surface, enough cloud to prevent glare; he had picked just the right flies from his book to suit the river, and the fish rose freely to them. He was carrying home as fine a dish of trout as any man could wish for, and had scrupulously thrown back everything under ten and a half inches. But even these things did not please him. He sucked hard at his cold pipe, and bit at fate as he tramped on inn-wards through the gathering dusk.

He came to a cross-roads once, and abused the Welsh authorities for not putting up a sign-post for his guidance. The district was new to him; indeed he had come there for that reason: he wanted to be alone for these last days in England. He had fished his way up stream all day, and instead of following the water windings back again, was making his return journey by road. And here, it appeared, were three roads to choose from. But he was a man of resource. He depicted mentally a map of the country, found the newly risen North star, and got his bearings, and then trudged on again with confidence among towering mountains.

It was night now, moonless, chill, and dark, and the mountains hung on either side like great walls of black-

ness. The road was white and faintly visible. But for all that he had presently to pull up sharply to avoid an obstruction. "Hullo," he said, "a motor car." And then aloud, "Anybody here?"

A grumbling voice answered him from the ditch. "Yes, I'm the driver, and I'm here bathing my confounded wrist."

"Had a smash? Can I help? What is it? Bone broken?"

"No, only a bad sprain"—the man peered at Carter through the dusk and added "sir."

"Your car seems to be standing up all right on her four wheels. How did you get pitched out?"

"Oh, it wasn't that sort of an accident. She was mis-firing badly, and then she stopped. When I tried to start her again, she back-fired on me and I thought my arm had gone. It's the jet in the carburetter that's choked, I believe, but I can't take the thing down with one hand."

"I could," Carter thought, and remembered certain episodes with his own first motor boat in Africa. But he did not mention this aloud. "Owner gone for help?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. But there's none round here. At least there's no such thing as a mechanic within twenty miles. A hay-motor and a tow to the nearest barn is the best one can expect."

"Where's your tool kit?"

"But do you understand motors, sir?" the man asked doubtfully.

"I had to. Just unship a light, and hold it with your sound hand so that I can see what I'm about. That's the ticket. You're sure it's the carburetter? Tried your spark and all four plugs?"

"Yes, sir, both the magneto and high tension. That's

all right. She's getting no gas; that's the trouble. It's the gasolene feed that's choked somewhere. I saw the fellow that filled us up this morning pour in from a red-rusty tin before I could stop him, and it'll be a flake of oxide from that jammed in the carburetter nozzle. If you could take it down for us, sir, I'm sure it would be a very great favor."

"Wait a bit. Before we begin to pull the car to pieces, suppose we just make sure of one or two other things. Got a stick or anything to sound your gasolene tank with?"

"Oh, that's all right. We haven't run sixty miles since I put in eight gallons."

But Carter straightened out a length of copper wire, unscrewed the cap, and sounded the tank. He pulled out the wire and examined it at the lamp. He wiped it carefully and tried a second time.

"Moses!" said the driver, "dry as a bone. Now, who's been playing pranks here? Must have been some of that nasty Welsh crowd that was hanging round whilst we was having lunch."

"Why, there's the union underneath the tank half unscrewed. That would account for the leak, anyway. Here, hold the lamp. Not too close. Yes, and the vibration has cracked the feed pipe. There's a gap I can get my finger nail into. Now, first of all, have you got any spare gasolene?"

"Yes, sir. Two tins."

"Good. Then it's worth while mending this feed pipe. I suppose you haven't a soldering iron?"

"Afraid not, sir. There's rubber solution——"

"Which gasolene melts. Here, let's go through your stock. Ah, here's a tube of seccotine. Now I'll show you a conjuring trick. If we give the crack three coats of that, and let each dry well before the next is put on— Good Lord! Kate!"

Miss O'Neill came up out of the darkness and bowed. "It's really very good of you, Mr. Carter, to trouble over my car."

"I didn't know it was yours. I didn't know you were in this neighborhood. In fact I did not know where you were."

Kate shrugged her shoulders. "Didn't some sapient person once record that coincidences were the commonest things in life? A minute ago I didn't know whether you were in England, or West Africa, or Grand Canary; and you didn't know or care whether I was alive or dead; and here we meet in the dark on an unnamed roadside in Wales. It's just one of those ordinary, every-day, impossible coincidences, which the vogue of motor cars is making a little more common than usual. I'm glad you're letting business differences sink for the moment."

"I didn't know it was your car."

"Or you'd have bitten off your hand sooner than have touched it?"

He laughed rather dryly. "I'm afraid I should have yielded to the temptation of meddling. You see, internal combustion engines are rather a fad of mine."

"Excellent reason. How long is this ingenious repair going to take?"

"H'm; three coats of seccotine—have to allow each twenty minutes to dry—call it an hour. After that I think if we couple up the union, and put in the spare gasolene your man says he's got, you should go sailing off without a hitch. By the way, I didn't know you motored."

"I'm full of unpleasant surprises."

"Yes, Cascaes, for instance."

"Well, why shouldn't I open up an O'Neill and Craven agency in Las Palmas, pray?"

"No reason whatever. I wasn't referring to Cascaes' business abilities."

"Wagner," said Miss O'Neill to her man, "there's a farm about a mile down this road where they'll bandage up your wrist, and make you some sort of a sling. Don't be away longer than you can help. Mr. Carter and I will look after the car till you get back."

"Thank you'm," said the driver, and marched off into the night. They stared after him till the sound of his footfalls on the hard road died away, and then said Miss O'Neill, "Why doesn't Mr. Cascaes answer when I cable?"

"You can hardly expect me to overlook the work of your Las Palmas agency."

"Don't quibble. Do you know why he is silent?"

"I can make a guess."

"Well, go on."

"He's probably too busy picking aloe thorns out of his carcass to find time for writing cables."

"Oh, so you threw him into an aloe hedge, did you? What did Laura say to that?"

"Well, as she knew nothing about it, she naturally did not comment."

"I see; and did Mr. Cascaes object?"

"Not obtrusively. He took the best licking I ever gave to man or dog without a whimper, and when I tossed him amongst those aloe hooks, he lay there just as he fell."

"Ah," said Kate, and drew a long breath.

"Keen on motoring?" Carter asked after a pause.

"I am, yes."

"I'm taking a light four-cylinder back to the Islands with me."

"Let me see, I promised you a wedding present, didn't I? Let me know when it's for, and what you'll have. By the way, talking of coincidences, I was motoring in the

Yorkshire dales a week or so ago, and coming down out of Wensleydale into Wharfedale, we dropped down over a perfectly terrific piece of road that cost me a back tire. Well, unluckily we'd used up the only other spare cover on the car already, so the only thing left was to go slowly on the rim on into the village below and wire for another.

"Such a dear old village it was, of gray stone houses, tucked away under the gray limestone hills, with all the gardens as bright with flowers as you find them in a story-book. The parson saw us when we came in from skating down that awful hill, and when he saw me afterwards strolling round looking at the flowers, he very nicely asked me to go in and look at his roses. A splendid old man he was, and such gorgeous roses. He likes big blooms, and he snips off the superfluous buds on the sly, and Mrs. Parson likes lots of blooms to cut at and to give away, and she's always on the watch after him to see he doesn't steal those buds. I met her, too, and they took me in and gave me tea.

"They'd some Okky war horns on the wall of their drawing-room, and I told them I'd a very fine one on mine, and so naturally we got to talking 'Coast.' They've a son out there—or to be more accurate, they had, because he seems to be in England now—and they're a good deal troubled about him. He keeps on making excuses instead of going to see them. Mrs. Parson, who by the way is a perfect dear, said they were afraid he had done something foolish and was shy about coming home——"

"Well?" said Carter.

"Oh, I'm pretty certain the prodigal would have no trouble with her."

"But the Parson? He said nothing about providing veal, I suppose?"

"He did not. To be precise he confined his conversation

to roses, and the dale, and a very charming old gentleman he was."

"As you may guess," said Carter savagely, "I don't thank you for going to inspect my people like that."

"I don't recollect," said Miss O'Neill with much sweetness, "ever asking you to thank me. By accident I stumble across some delightful people; I have the opportunity of enjoying their society, and for the sake of seeing more of them I lived in the village for three whole days. They've asked me to go and stay with them next summer, and I'm going. I don't see how that can annoy you, as you've given up going near them."

"I think that crack in the gasoline pipe will stand another coat of seccotine now," said Carter, and moved the lamp and knelt once more in the dusty road.

"It seems a pity," said Miss O'Neill musingly.

"I don't see what business it is of yours anyway," Carter snapped.

"Oh, but surely it's my car that you're so kindly working at. And I do think it's a pity you should have all that trouble with that nasty, smelling, sticky seccotine, when it will all have to be scratched off to-morrow, and the hole soldered up."

Carter laughed in spite of his rage. "You didn't mean that in the least, but I'll own up you drew me smartly enough. It is a pity—I mean the other thing—I love the dale, and I'm about as fond as a man can be of my people. But when you're in love with a girl, and you've promised to marry her, well, other things have to slide."

"Ah, love," said Kate thoughtfully. "I wonder what being in love is really like? I must try it some day as an experience. It seems to alter one's obligations. I should like you to hear my friend the Parson on obligations."

"I can tell you his creed in the matter as he taught it to me as far back as I can remember. The rule, according to him, is: First, keep your word; second, go on keeping it; third, don't let any other considerations whatever interfere with your keeping it."

"Spartan, simple, admirable," said Kate, and then could have bitten out her tongue for sending the words past her lips. She took Carter's hand impulsively enough, and, "I beg your pardon for that," she said. "I may think you're a fool, but I know you are also the most honorable man alive."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SONG OF SPEED

For a business woman, Kate took singularly small interest in her letters that morning, and Mrs. Craven from behind the coffee-pot looked at her rather wistfully. They were staying in the Lakes, and were supposed to be motor-ing. But though the old lady was vigorous enough, and was only too pleased to bustle about from place to place, Kate was listless, and always had an excuse when change was suggested. As a reason, she said she had been over-working herself, and wanted to sit still and do nothing; but she did not believe this herself nor did Mrs. Craven believe it. Moreover, Kate knew that Mrs. Craven dis-believed.

She was a very healthy young woman as a general thing, but that morning she ate a thoroughly bad breakfast, and crumbled a slice of toast beside her plate to give a general idea of performance. Then she threw her napkin on the table, and again went through the envelopes. There was one from the Liverpool office. She opened it, and drew out half a dozen typewritten sheets. But the distaste for business was big in her, and she was putting these down with the rest when a name caught her eye.

Cascaes.

She read the sentence surrounding it. "Our Mr. Cas-caes cables that he this morning married a Miss Laura Slade, and on her insistence hereby tenders us his resignation."

Kate snapped the papers together, looked at her bracelet watch and stood up briskly.

"Aunt Jane, I am sorry, but a very important matter has turned up which drags me off to Liverpool for the day."

Mrs. Craven was a wise woman and could read signs. Moreover, she had known Kate from three years old, upwards. "My dear," she said, "I'm rejoiced at your news. Go and make it up with him."

Kate blushed and laughed. "It isn't that at all, aunt. Or only partly. But I must go."

"There's no train now till mid-day."

"I shall motor down to Carnforth and cut off the 10.38 there."

"If you don't break your neck in the process, you'll land in gaol for excessive speed," said the old lady; "and," she added dryly, "I'm sure you'd prefer even one of those alternatives to staying sensibly here with me, and waiting for a train in the decent course of things. There, run along, Kitty, and get your things on, and I'll go and incite Wagner."

Miss O'Neill went upstairs to her bedroom two steps at a time, and for the moment was minded to drag on any outer clothes that would cover her. But then a thought came to her, and she smiled, and took out from its box a Paris hat that she had never worn before. She pinned this into place with infinite care, covered it and her auburn hair with a capacious motor veil, and hung another veil, which had in it a protective window of talc, over her pretty face. And then she put on a great motor coat. She was very much guarded from the dust and the weather externally, but inside the ugly chrysalis was as spruce a Kitty O'Neill as any man could have sighed after.

Wagner, as usual when he was wanted, had "just gone

out" for something. But Kate had an enthusiast's knowledge of her that year's forty-horse car. She saw that both electric and magneto ignitions were switched off, and then she turned on her gasoline, flooded the carburetter, and applied herself to the starting handle. There was a high compression in the engine, but she was strong, and just then she was goaded by something which made her put out just a fraction more (she thought) than the full of her strength. She filled the cylinders with gas. Then she threw in the switch to all the insulators, and the engine started most obediently. She stepped into the driving seat, collected her wraps, threw out the clutch, dropped in the first speed, and let the clutch slide home.

The car drew out, as if it had been pulled by a rope, and Kate flung a last hand wave to Mrs. Craven. Then she got on to the direct drive of the third speed, and checked her throttle to keep down the pace till she was out of the traffic.

"Six-and-twenty miles to Carnforth," she reckoned, "and the train goes through there in just sixty-one minutes from now. Well, I should average thirty-five miles an hour for the run, and that will leave me nice time to find someone to take charge of the car, and buy a ticket to Liverpool for myself."

They pulled out of the village, and Kate pushed up her spark and throttle levers notch by notch. The purr of the motor increased in shrillness. She drove often herself, but seldom at high speeds, and just now, when she got into the long empty stretches of straight, out of sheer exhilaration she let out the great car till it was wheeling along at a good forty miles to the hour. It swayed rather dangerously, but she had no nerves to be ruffled by a trifle like that. The motor was giving out its high note of exultant speed, and she was thrilled with the power she rode.

Woods and rocks flew by, mile after mile of fencing shot astern, but still the great car sang along its way, now bumping over a grip, now slackening a trifle on a rise. The rhythm of the engines sounded in her ears like a poem, and she tended to their needs with a real affection; the pelt of the air exhilarated her.

And then came the downfall. A whistle shrieked out from behind her, another whistle shrilled in front, and a policeman sprang from the hedge. Kate was in no mood for stopping. She tried to dodge round the man. With ignorant courage he leaped across the road to stop her. She threw out her clutch and desperately set her brakes. The great car lurched, slid, sidled, and all but overturned. The policeman, by a marvellous mixture of skill, presence of mind, and luck on Kate's part, was not killed. But he stood scorching his hand on a very warm radiator, and Kate sat white-faced at the wheel, taming down her insulted engines.

After that there was no hurry. She pleaded a life and death engagement, but the majesty of the law was ruffled, and saw to it that all things were done with dignity and in order.

Kate was charged with driving to the danger of the public. The road was entirely deserted just there, and there was no public, but she admitted the crime, gave name and number, and humbly asked to go. But not a bit of it. The Law wanted to see her driving license, which of course she had not got, and then out came note-books and pencils. The criminal lost her temper, and so the Law was deliberately slow. . . .

Kate reached Carnforth station just three minutes after the express had left, and was half-minded there and then to give up the chase. Carter would sail in the *Seconde* at the appointed hour, and when he got to Las Palmas and

heard the news he would return to her by the next boat. She was sure enough of that. But no, she could not let him go. It might be (terrific thing) unmaidenly of her to thrust herself and her news in his way, but she could not help it. Besides, a fear cramped her when she thought of Cascaes. She had heard to her horror of the knife that Cascaes had wielded so undeftly in the dark along the Telde road, although indeed Carter had made no mention of it, and she dreaded what might happen should the two men come together a second time.

She looked at the time-table; there was no train that would help her. If she wanted to get to Liverpool before the *Secondees* sailed, it must be by car. So once more she sat herself in the seat of government. . . .

The road held through Lancaster to Preston, and outside towns and villages she crashed along often at a fifty-mile gait in her fear at being too late. And then came the black cotton towns of Lancashire with their slatternly women and shrill-voiced children scrambling over the streets. She had to slow to a crawl through these, and even then the tires skated dangerously over the greasy streets. But speed triumphed over time and distance in the end. She swung at a rattling gait into a Liverpool suburb, and for the third time had her number taken by an indignant policeman, and thereafter slowed to a dignified crawl. She glanced at her watch. With care now, and if no mishap blocked her progress, she would be on the landing stage before the mail-boat threw off her ropes.

Luck and good nerve aided her bravely now. She wormed her way rapidly through the increasing traffic of the Liverpool streets, and came to the landing stage entrance.

She patted her car and gave it a word of gratitude. A cabman took charge, and with him also she left motor

veils, coat and gloves, and walked down onto the landing stage fully conscious of neat hair, a perfect frock, and the Paris hat. Carter was standing gloomily at the bookstall, with a chin that looked more dogged and hair that was redder than ever.

"Ah," she said lightly, "fancy meeting you here. Weren't you going by last week's boat?"

"No," he said heavily, "this."

"Have you paid for your passage?"

"Yes, of course. Why?"

"Because I'm afraid you will waste it."

He shook his head.

"You had no cable from Las Palmas during the last two days?"

"No. Have you? What are you driving at?" There was something so pathetic in his brown eyes that she had not the heart to drag out her explanation any further. She pulled a letter from her pocket, marked a place with her thumb and showed it to him.

He put a heavy hand down on the bookstall and stirred the papers into little heaps. "My God! Laura married. Married! Let me think what this means!"

A very indignant bookstall keeper began to make remarks, but Kate said, "Thank you. Those are the ones I want. Please tie them up for me. Here's a sovereign." And then she put a hand on Carter's arm and led him outside the crowd.

"Well," she said, "have you decided yet if you are entirely broken-hearted?"

He thought a minute, and then said he, "I think my people will be glad when they hear."

Kate blushed rosy pink. "They are both very fond of me," she observed.

"That," said Carter, "is what I was thinking about."

Kitty, darling, there isn't a girl in all Africa, Europe, or America, who has been loved as dearly as I've loved you. But I couldn't marry you, could I, till the way was cleared. Now, could I?—here, let's get out of this crowd, and hire a cab, and drive to the North Pole, or somewhere we can be alone to talk all this out. It's wonderful."

"But what about your baggage?"

"Oh, bother the baggage. White-Man's-Trouble has it somewhere, and he'll jump overboard if he finds I'm not on the ship. There's no shaking off that boy, Kitty dear, so I'm afraid you'll have to take him along with me when you cease to be Kitty O'Neill."

"George, do you know I've got a great secret for you. I'm not Kitty O'Neill at all. I'm Kitty Meredith."

"As a point of fact I gathered that from your father. From what old Cattie Image told me, 'Major Smith,' as he calls him, will be home in time to give you away on your wedding day. But I shouldn't trouble to call yourself Kate Meredith, if I were you, sweetheart. When you do practise a new signature let it be Kitty Carter."

Kate blushed again most divinely. "As the deepest of secrets, let me tell you that I can write it quite well already, though I have been desperately afraid I should never have the luck to use it."

THE END

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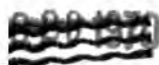






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